

THE WAY TO HUMAN FREEDOM

Study 4

THE DILEMMA OF A FALLEN HUMANITY

So far in our series we have looked at who God is, and marveled at the perfections of His holy Being as Father, Creator and King. We have also seen what humankind was created to be—grasping something of the magnificent nature of our high calling. And we have seen what the entire human race has tragically become, through its ‘moral fall’ at the beginning of history.

The proclamation of human depravity in Study 3 may, indeed, have been disturbing. As those structured to be the image of God, such naked revelation of our moral descent can, understandably, be personally devastating—even infuriating!

However, in order to adequately diagnose the nature of our fallen-human situation—and come to embrace its glorious divine solution—there is *still more* that needs to be said about the nature of our sad state.

In this study, we will see how the dark dynamics of Study 3 heavily *impact* the life of every rebellious human creature, without exception. It will become very clear that *personal dis-integration*—often attributed to an unfortunate background or difficult present circumstances—has a deeper and more immediate source.

It will be shown how every person living out of fellowship with God is faced with a *dilemma*. That is, each has to choose between—what is for them—two totally unacceptable alternatives: *delight* in their Creator, or the *despair* that consistently comes from living against Him. In the face of this dilemma, there is then a relentless and desperate quest to create a *third* alternative, which involves neither delight in God nor the pain of despair. This third alternative, however, at best, never fulfills the deepest cry of the heart, and, at worst, ends in what is constantly dreaded—an intolerable sense of personal human hopelessness.

Our study will, actually, do two things: It will comprehensively describe the nature and affects of this dilemma, and will open up the way for a decisive experience of *the grace of God*—a personally transforming revelation, that is able to bring *freedom* from the pursuit of false hopes on the one hand, and the pain of crushing despair on the other.

With a view to this universally longed for outcome, an *irrefutable reality* is going to be unfolded before our eyes: the *endless restless-struggle* that is known by all who live in ongoing rebellion against the One who created them, and sustains them every moment.

But before we begin, there is something that must first be done. We need to observe some very significant background scenery.

our spiritual context:

(as those who are God-refusing & rebellious)

- the dominion of darkness

(the oppressive realm of the world, the flesh & the devil)

The ‘dominion of darkness’ is a realm that operates with great power within the fallen-human scene. Every person who lives outside of an assurance of God’s grace operates, every day, under the deadly influence of this dark dominion.

Luke 1:79

[They are] living in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Isaiah 60:2

—a *dreadful spiritual reality*

Darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.

Colossians 1:13, declares that in order to know personal freedom, all must be *rescued* from the tyrannical realm of the dominion of darkness. Each one must be liberated from its deadening power through the total forgiveness of their sins. This will become increasingly apparent as we move through the study before us.

The dominion of darkness is made up of three elements: ‘the world’, ‘the flesh’ and ‘the devil’ (and the spiritual powers he commands). There is not one rebellious, fallen-human situation where these three

dark entities do not dominate—maintaining the death, unrighteousness and restless desperation spoken of in Study 3.

Whatever their culture, class or environment, this is the deceptive and oppressive spiritual context in which every rebellious human creature lives, every moment.

the world

The world in the Scriptures is three things:

- *a planet* (the earth, the creation, the world we live in—Acts 17:24: “[God] made the world”)
- *people* (the earth’s population—John 3:16: “God so loved the world”)
- *a power* (a powerful anti-God system—1 John 2:15: “Do not love the world”)

Here, in describing the dominion of darkness we are speaking of the last of these three, the world as a *power*. Being a powerful anti-God system, the world can be described as: *society set up and organized against God and His truth—opposing His will and perverting His way*.

The New Testament Scriptures speak much about this powerful system. The following are some examples of its teaching:

Romans 12:2

—*the world’s insistent way of operating*

[There is] ‘the pattern of this world’.

Galatians 1:4

—*the world-system’s era of domination*

[There is] ‘the present evil age’.

1 Corinthians 2:12

—*the world’s way of thinking*

[There is] ‘the spirit [or attitude] of the world’.

1 Corinthians 3:19

—*the world’s ‘wisdom’*

The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.

1 John 4:5

—*the world’s loyal instructors & their attentive hearers*

[False teachers] are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.

Ephesians 2:2a

—*the vocational action of every rebel human*

You followed the ways of this world.

James 4:4

—*a disastrous friendship*

Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

1 John 2:15

—*a system devoid of divine love*

If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you.

Ephesians 2:12

—*the sad state of a rebellious humanity*

[Apart from the grace of God we are] without hope and without God in the world.

the flesh

‘The flesh’ is our sinful humanity operating apart from response to the Spirit, obsessed with it-self and opposed to God, His will and way. This term sums up the things spoken of in the previous study on human fallenness. Some translations of the Bible call the flesh our ‘sinful nature’.

Again, the New Testament places much emphasis upon our need to recognize this dark dynamic that is, perpetually, asserting itself within every rebellious human heart and mind.

Ephesians 2:3

All of us also lived among [the disobedient] at one time, gratifying the cravings of our [flesh] and following its desires and thoughts.

Galatians 5:17

The [flesh] desires what is contrary to [God’s] Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the [flesh]. They are in conflict with each other.

Romans 7:18

I know that [nothing good dwells in me], that is, in my [flesh]. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

Galatians 3:22

The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner to sin.

There is not one person in this world that is not oppressed by the strong, idolatrous passions of our fallen-human nature. Apart from an experience of the grace of God, this oppression takes the shape of a total domination.

the devil— & the spiritual powers he commands

The devil, or Satan—appearing as ‘the serpent’ in Genesis 3—is a personal spiritual being who exercises great power of evil, both against God and towards humanity.

He was created as a glorious angelic creature and given much authority. However, he fell into rebellion through jealousy and pride—probably when he saw the magnificence of human beings created in God’s image; and now uses what was given to him as a means of setting up his own *counterfeit* kingdom against the kingdom of God.

He has no power or authority of himself, and can only operate out of what he has received. He is certainly not a force equal to God in the universe. There is not a ‘dualism’ with two equal and opposing powers battling it out. Satan is simply a powerful and rebellious spiritual *creature*. The Lord, in His sovereign wisdom, has chosen to allow him—and the spiritual powers he commands—to continue in rebellion for a time.

Ezekiel 28:17

—*the moral descent of the ancient king of Tyre, an illustration of Satan’s fall*

Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom.

Isaiah 14:13–14

—*the king of Tyre’s quest, a classic example of satanic ambition*

You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God.

... I will make myself like the Most High.”

The king of Tyre—a servant of ‘the evil one’—certainly reflected the nature of his master.

The devil, in his fierce hatred for God, hates humanity, seeks to lock it into its rebellion, rob it of its glory, and see it ruined and wasted. His actions are relentless and not to be disregarded or taken lightly—as the following Scriptures make clear:

1 Peter 5:8

[He is] ‘your enemy the devil’.

Revelation 12:10

[He is] ‘the accuser’.

Matthew 4:3

[He is] ‘the tempter’.

John 10:10

[He is] the thief [who] comes only to steal, kill and destroy.

John 8:44

He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.

When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

2 Corinthians 11:3

[At the Fall] Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning.

2 Corinthians 11:14

[Satan] masquerades as an angel of light.

Revelation 12:9

[He is] that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.

Revelation 20:3

[His powers are spent in] deceiving the nations.

2 Corinthians 4:4

[He is] ‘the god of this age’ [who] has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

John 16:11

[He is] ‘the prince of this world’.

1 John 5:19

We know ... that the whole world [system] is under the control of the evil one.

John 8:44a

—*Jesus' words to "respectable" religious leaders*

"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires."

In Study 2 we saw—in outline—what it means to fulfill our holy calling to be the image and likeness of God. The great tragedy of our fallen-humanity described in Study 3, is that the devil has succeeded in 'creating', or better, *deforming* us into his own likeness! HOW HORRIBLE!!!

And yet this is the vocational reality of all who remain in rebellion towards their Maker. Their father is the devil and they are his servants. Everyday they unwittingly, yet willingly, live according to his way and do his will.

When Adam sinned, it was as if the serpent's poison entered into his humanity—and what was so for him has become so for us all, from birth!

Ephesians 2:2

—*servants of the serpent-king*

You followed the ways of ... the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

2 Thessalonians 2:9–10

—*the devil's tools of deception: the spectacular, or just every day 'brain-numbing' passion*

He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing.

Satan's great quest throughout history has been—and continues to be—to set up systems of worship that are directed towards him. Those engaged in such worship, do so thinking they are offering it to an authentic god (or some other object of trust and allegiance)—unaware that they are, in reality, devotees of the evil one. His 'world system' is *a kingdom of false worship*—a realm that is initiated and maintained by him, with his adulation as its supreme goal.¹

Job 1:7

—*the restless 'lord' of his dark domain*

The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

demonic powers

Satan is head over countless numbers of fallen angels—or demonic spirits—by which he *incites and stirs up 'the flesh'*, and *maintains the system of 'the world'*.

It seems that when the devil—or Lucifer, as he was called—fell into rebellion, these spiritual beings joined him in his quest to overthrow the kingdom and purpose of God. Then, banished from their privileged position—like their lord—they were doomed to invisibly roam the earth² until the day of their final condemnation, at the climax of history.

From the time of their banishment, they have—in wild hatred for their Creator and His image—incessantly operated as 'spiritual terrorists' in God's world, under Satan's command. Although their powerful influence should not be over-stated, it is a fact that the impact of their energies among the nations has been, and is today, horrendous—in more ways than is generally supposed. Together with their master they are the enemies of God and His purpose—and so, the whole of humankind.

Matthew 25:41

[There is] 'the devil and his angels'.

Matthew 12:24

[The devil was called] 'Beelzebul, the prince of demons'.

Colossians 2:8

[There are] 'the [dark] elemental spiritual forces of this world'.

Revelation 16:14

[There are] 'demonic spirits that perform signs'.

¹ Further on in the series, we will see what God has done to 'destroy the works of the devil' and liberate His people into the life-giving worship they were created to enjoy!

² Their abode is the 'heavenly realms'—which is a way of describing the 'unseen spiritual realm'.

Ephesians 6:12

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

1 Corinthians 10:20, 22

The sacrifices of [false religions] are offered to demons, not to God.

* * *

And so this is the grim spiritual context of rebellious humanity. The enormous significance of these three elements of the dominion of darkness will be very evident throughout the rest of the series. To disregard them, would be to ignore a powerful reality that affects human living at every level.

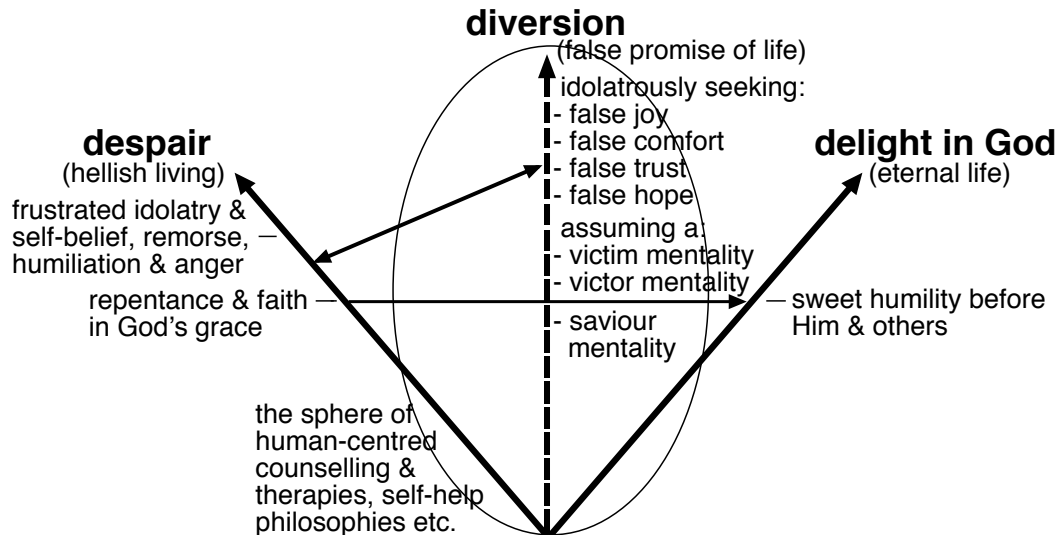
Now we may give our attention to the *dilemma* that faces every person within this context—who has chosen to be engaged in rebellion against a good and faithful Creator.

rejecting our Maker, we lock ourselves into:

AN ENDLESS RESTLESS-STRUGGLE

The dilemma known in our rebellion, simply put, is this: fallen human creatures don't want to *delight* in God, walk with Him and do His will. But at the same time, they also can't bear the *despair* experienced in living against Him! The problem is that these are the only two, truly, substantial alternatives.

In our human resourcefulness, however, we—as mentioned in the introduction—relentlessly set about attempting to create a *third* alternative: the establishment of all kinds of 'clever' *diversional strategies* that promise deliverance from the old, ever-lurking enemy, despair. These diversional devices are *false* and *idolatrous* objects of joy, comfort, trust and hope. They, of course, promise much, but in reality—as also mentioned previously—can never fulfill the deepest cries of the human heart. When they fail—and they inevitably do—the bright-eyed rebel falls yet again, back into dull-spirited despair. And so there is this 'endless restless-struggle' as we move, forwards and backwards, between the two.



The 'diversion' section of the diagram above is represented by a broken line, rather than a continuous one. This is because idolatry—being against the way of God—is *not* substantial, always in the end failing to deliver what it promises. When the life we were created to enjoy is sought in anything other than God Himself and His way, such wholehearted pursuit is inevitably proved to be a *false hope*.

The fact will always remain, that in life before 'the Living God' there are only two *substantial* and *enduring* possibilities: *delight in Him*—out of a clear conscience and a free spirit—or the *despair* that results from living against Him.

Some—for various reasons—have extremely well maintained diversional structures in their lives, and don't find themselves, often, tasting the depths of despair that others do. But constant vigilance is required for this to be so. Every honest-minded person will acknowledge that the peace and the joys known in their creaturely rebellion are, extremely fragile.

This is how one film scriptwriter has described the fallen-human situation: “We are all born into this world shipwrecked, struggling between hope and despair.” Although not a very pleasant image, it is certainly one with which many would painfully identify.

In seeking to overcome the ever-present threat of despair, our diversional systems can often be very ‘religious’. In this, we may form our *own* idea of the god we will worship. Such a self-constructed deity is often ‘user-friendly’—and is called upon to serve our purposes!

It may, of course, be that a view of God—or a spiritual belief-system—is adopted that is far from convenient or comforting. They are, more often in fact, extremely oppressive. Not much needs to be known of the various religions of the world to confirm this. Here we have further illustration of the ‘false god/religion’ part of the Study 3 diagram.

Although our diversional mechanisms are futile—being destined to failure—we, nevertheless, ceaselessly *reconstruct* and often *reshape* them, in our desperate quest to succeed in godlessly finding life. There is, actually, nothing quite so demeaning of our humanity, than the incessant *restlessness* that characterizes such pursuits.

Jeremiah 2:36–37

—*from one thing to another, but to no benefit*

Why do you go about so much, changing your ways? You will be disappointed ... you will not be helped.

Isaiah 57:10

—*the rebel’s untiring determination*

You wearied yourself by such going about, but you would not say, ‘It is hopeless’. You found renewal of your strength and so you did not faint.

Our ways of diversion are many, and our dogged resourcefulness in maintaining them amazing. But no matter how vigilant we are, it is true that none of these devices will ultimately deliver what they promise. Despair is always threatening to knock at the door.

In the diagram above, we see that the despair known is often accompanied by *remorse*. Remorse is an experience of sorrow, but not towards God. It is merely a self-absorbed regret for the way things have turned out. “I’ve done the wrong thing.” “I’ve let myself down.” “I’ve really messed things up.” “I’ve wrecked everything for myself.” “I’m never going to make it.” “I’ve ruined my reputation.” It has to do with a dark spirit of *humiliation*, personally and before others—and of course, in reality, before the Ever-Personally-Present One. It is a dominant expression of the ‘hellish’ or ‘tormented living’ referred to in the diagram.

Remorse is so different to the beautiful experience of *repentance*. Repentance involves sorrow before God, which brings a complete *change of mind* towards Him, faith in His grace, a sweet humility before Him and others, and a desire to be restored to His will and way.

In future studies we will see how it is that repentance and faith bring us immediately back into fellowship with God—and so, into that eternal quality of life for which we were created.

The restoration repentance and faith brings is swift and liberating! Remorse, however, only serves to keep us in the never-ending restless-struggle that we hate, but won’t give up on—that struggle between the idolatrous, diversional structures we persistently erect, and the despair that always returns when they fail.

doing it tough

In a life lived against *God*, there is often the sense of having everything against *us*. “Life is hard,” we say, “But it’s not our fault. We deserve better, and so it’s only right that there be some good ‘coping mechanisms’ for us to make use of!” This is the *victim mentality* mentioned in the diagram, that is readily, built into the minds of rebellious human creatures. We will see other ways in which this attitude is expressed a little later in our present study.

Another part of the ‘everything is against us’ idea is the *victor mentality*. “Its tough, but I’m tougher! I’m a survivor—an over-comer! I have a positive mental attitude. I know how to handle whatever has come, or will come, my way. I know what I want, and no person, situation or thing will prevent me from getting it!”

We’ll see further on in the series that there certainly *is* a grand and joyous *overcoming* to be known by God’s grace. Although this involves personal decisive-ness and mental discipline, it is a very different thing to the desperate, proudly self-focused attitude of ‘victor thinking’.

Yet another variation of the ‘everything is against us’ perspective is the *saviour mentality*. “Its tough for others too, but they don’t need to worry—*I’m* here!” Some actually ‘survive’ personally by taking on the

role of being 'saviour' to others—a 'Mr. or Ms. Fix-it!' Many find themselves driven into various counselling and therapeutic areas as a means of 'self-healing'—processing their own struggle as they 'help' others. As with the victim mentality, further expression of this will also be seen later.

Although in rebellion we hate despair, we also hate the prospect of repentance; and in our hostility towards God, *demand* that there be that *third alternative* we've been speaking of. The *rage* of the despairing rebel—who was created to enjoy the blessedness of the Creator Himself—is deep, and never far from expression, one way or another. Such anger is one of the dark dynamics at the heart of the fallen-human struggle.

All of our diversional actions are expressions of willful rejection of the One who calls us into the 'righteousness, peace and joy' of His kingdom. 'In the flesh' we are determined to have these things our *own* way, apart from Him. But living against the Giver of Life is never the easy option.

Acts 26:14

[The Lord said,] "It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

The 'goads' were sharp spikes fitted to an ox cart—or to the end of a hand-held pole—to discourage the ox from kicking back against the driver. Some particularly unruly and stubborn oxen would keep on kicking until their legs were painfully bloodied.

Our good Creator is by no means a 'driver', in the perverse sense of that word. This would better describe Satan. But He is, indeed, the Holy One, who is always directing us into His way, and the freedom and fullness it brings. And—as our key concept in this study is now about to show—will *give us up* to the painful consequences of our foolish and willful rebellion.

*** *the action of God's wrath (the holy anger of His love)***

God's wrath is a *holy* anger. As such, it is completely unlike the anger of sinful human beings. It is, truly, the anger of His love.

As was seen in Study 1, He has total integrity in the judgments He brings within human history. They are always right, just and fair—and always for the ultimate good of those who taste them, if they will respond in repentance and faith.

A major way that His wrath is expressed is to *personally give us over* to the consequences of our rebellion. The *despair* of His defiant creatures is not something He takes pleasure in, but it is, nonetheless, what He *rightly* gives us up to.

His righteous opposition to rebellious humanity is 'the wrath of His love', in which He commands all to turn from their rebellion and know His divine goodness towards them.

He is by nature love, not wrath

As we also saw in Study 1, God is rightfully wrathful in the face of human evil. But it could never be said that 'God is wrath'. His word tells us that He is 'light', and that He is 'love'. Wrath is a righteous response He makes to what is grievous and offensive to Him, but it is not what He *is*.

Lamentations 3:33

He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to any human being.

Isaiah 63:9

In all their distress He too was distressed.

Ezekiel 18:23, 32

Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? ... I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

Jeremiah 3:19

How gladly I would treat you like My children and give you ... the most beautiful inheritance.

Psalms 145:8-9

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in [unfailing] love. The LORD is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.

Psalms 116:5

God is full of [mercy and] compassion.

2 Corinthians 1:3

[He is] the Father of [mercy and] compassion and the God of all comfort.

Isaiah 30:18

The LORD longs to be gracious to you.

Deuteronomy 4:31

The LORD your God is a merciful God.

Ephesians 2:4

God ... is rich in mercy.

Micah 7:18b

[He delights] to show mercy.

Psalms 78:37–38

They were not faithful ... Yet He was merciful ... Time after time He restrained His anger and did not stir up His full wrath.

Psalms 103:10

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

love stirred to wrath

He is by nature love, not wrath. But in His love, wrath is evoked in the face of what is abhorrent to Him. Everything that corrupts our humanity is confronted by His 'hot love'!

Isaiah 28:21

[The LORD] will do His work, His strange work, and perform His task, His alien task.

The desired action of the Holy One is to bless those He has created in His likeness. And yet, in the face of human rebellion and sin, He will carry out His 'strange work', His 'alien task' of judgment. This is always for the sake of His name, and—if they will have it that way—the ultimate correction and blessedness of the objects of His love.

In the following Scriptures, we see the determined and dynamic nature of our Creator's wrath towards His stubbornly rebellious creatures:

Romans 1:18

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and [unrighteousness] of those who suppress the truth by their [unrighteousness].

Romans 1:24]

God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity.

Romans 1:26

God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Romans 1:27

[They] received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Romans 1:28

Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind.

Psalms 81:11–12

[They] would not listen to Me [or submit to Me]. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.

Isaiah 19:3

—*given up to the occult*

I will bring their plans to nothing; they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead, the mediums and the spiritists.

2 Thessalonians 2:10–11

They refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie.

Isaiah 6:9–10

—*giving His stubbornly rebellious people up to the consequences they deserve*

[The LORD said:] "Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving'. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Psalms 7:11

God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses His wrath every day.

Ephesians 2:3b

Like the rest [of those who live in rebellion], we were by nature [those under] wrath.

Isaiah 26:9–10

When Your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness. Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the LORD.

2 Peter 2:9

The Lord knows how ... to hold the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Isaiah 5:24–25

They have rejected the law of the LORD Almighty and spurned [His] word ... Therefore, the LORD'S anger burns against His people.

Jeremiah 4:4

[He says], "My wrath will break out and burn like fire."

Deuteronomy 29:19–20

They invoke a blessing on themselves and therefore think, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way" ... The LORD will never be willing to forgive them [while they continue in that frame of mind]; His wrath and zeal will burn against them.

Because *light* and *love* are part of Gods nature as Father, when He is wrathful there is nothing morally dark or loveless about it. His wrath always flows from the utter purity of His divine Being, and is a manifestation of His glorious holy love in the face of human evil.

Psalms 90:11

[Lord] Your wrath is as great as the fear [and reverent awe] that is due to You.

The joyous, reverent awe of which our Maker is worthy is, indeed, vast in its dimensions. His wrath against ugly human disdain towards Him would, rightly, be in *direct proportion* to those dimensions. No wonder the impact of it is felt so keenly! Of course, the full force of His wrath is rarely known. Such is His great mercy.

tasting the wrath of the Holy One

The experience of Gods wrath is never pleasant. It is not meant to be.

Psalms 107:10–11

Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom ... for they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High.

Jeremiah 3:21

A cry is heard ... the weeping and pleading of the people ... because they have perverted their ways and have forgotten the LORD their God.

Isaiah 50:11

All you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from My hand: you will lie down in torment.

Jeremiah 2:19

"Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of Me," declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty.

Isaiah 1:5–6

Why do you persist in your rebellion? ... Your whole heart is afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness.

the ever-present choice

The experience of God's wrath is never pleasant. But it is also something that may be avoided, by simply responding truly to His word.

Isaiah 28:12

He said, "This is the resting-place, let the weary rest"; and, "This is the place of repose"—but they would not listen.

Jeremiah 5:3

[He] crushed them but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent.

Isaiah 30:15

In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.

The matter of 'salvation' was mentioned briefly in Study 1. It means deliverance, rescue, healing, comfort, and integration or wholeness. A healing, soothing ointment is called a 'salve'. This is what every unrepentant person refuses.

Later in the series, the incredible nature of God's salvation for 'sinners' will be magnificently set before us. And from then on, we will see its liberating effect in every area of human life and vocation.

2 Corinthians 7:10

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

The exercise of repentance and faith in God's grace is always the only way out of a 'life of death, unrighteousness and restless desperation'. Refusal of repentance brings constantly recurring despair—coming from frustrated idolatry and self-belief, and expressed in remorse, humiliation and anger. The result? The rebel is pressed into a foolish, endless pursuit of false hope.

How senseless and needless is such ongoing personal struggle and despair. And as will be seen, how simple and eternally liberating is the salvation that has been made available to every person! No one needs to continue on in life without full enjoyment of the goodness, mercy and grace of their faithful Creator. The choice is always there: 'Repent and live!'³

We will look now in detail at the deep anguish that is known under our Maker's wrath, and the ways we defiantly attempt to divert ourselves from it.

in the wrath of His love, God personally
gives us over to despair producing:

GUILT

- in the area of CONSCIENCE

a sense of **condemnation & shame**

—diversion: seeking godless relief by blaming someone or something else, condemning others, performing better, changing the rules, denying the facts, or punishing ourselves

In coming to the matter of guilt, we are touching upon what is at the heart of all personal despair. *Unrelieved guilt* is the most painful element of the dilemma that rebellious humanity faces.

the relentless demands of the human conscience

It must be said from the outset that *nothing* but total conformity to God's holy law—'the high human calling'—will satisfy the conscience of one made in His image. Only what satisfies our Creator, can truly satisfy this 'inner judge of the human soul'.

Romans 2:15

The requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

We saw briefly in Study 3, and will see later, that the conscience is not always an accurate guide. It depends very much on how it has been educated.

But regardless of the cultural instruction someone's conscience has received, there is still the persistent witness of God's law in the heart. Even if all of the *culturally conditioned* requirements of the

³ Once a person comes to receive the extraordinary salvation referred to above, they are not exempt from the experience we have been speaking of here. All persistent rebellion will certainly result in tasting the wrath of the Holy One. However, for those who have received God's grace, this will never be 'wrath unto condemnation'. It will be totally with a view to their being restored to faithfulness—as it clearly was among the LORD'S people in the Old Testament period. Here, the wrath of His love is a strong, fatherly chastening and discipline—rightfully painful. A future study will spell out in detail the nature a rebellious believer's experience of wrath. Another will also show how *every* experience of struggle and anguish is, by no means, an expression of the wrath we have been speaking of. It is so often to do with the Father's purposeful, developmental action towards His children—that they may more truly fulfill their high human calling. This too, can be referred to as the exercise of divine discipline.

conscience were kept, that would not remove the unending demands of *God's law* that are—by creation—etched into the deepest part of a person's being.

There is no despair like that which comes from a tormented and unrelieved conscience. It is unbearable. And so we set up our various systems of diversion in order to take away the pain.

It was said earlier that our diversionary mechanisms are, actually, idolatrous. At first, those used in this area of 'guilt-relief' may not appear to be idolatrous—in the way that idolatry is generally viewed. But they are, nevertheless, things we give 'worth-ship' to as a means of finding comfort for our conscience. They are what we immediately resort to instead of *acknowledging* the God-revealed truth of our situation, and *looking* to what He has done to bring relief and freedom in it.

our 'guilt diversions'

The diversionary mechanisms that are operated in the face of guilt are many, and are desperately implemented. They are the 'first line of defense' in our perpetual war against personal despair.

1) blaming someone or something else

We try to godlessly find relief from the accusations of our conscience by *blaming* our behaviour onto *someone* or *something* else. "It wasn't *my* fault!" "It happened because of my difficult circumstances." "It was because of my unfortunate background". "It was because of the way my parents treated me." "It was because of the genes I have inherited—what can you do about that!" "It was because I have been deprived of so much." "I wouldn't have thought, said, or done it if *they* hadn't said or done *that!*" "I'm not that kind of person, but you can only take so much!"

This is all part of the 'victim mentality' referred to earlier. Of course, there *are* many kinds of unfortunate and painful things that happen to us—often, very sad, and even horrible, things. But to take the role of a victim is never the way of personal freedom and fullness.

Genesis 3:11-13

—*Adam & Eve playing the 'blame game'*

[The LORD said to the man], "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman You put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

"IT WASN'T MY FAULT!" cried the first couple. And, notice what Adam said? "The woman *You* put here with me, *she* ... Yes, *I* did it, but *You* put *her* in the picture. You can't blame *me!*"

What happened there at the beginning of fallen-human history has continued down through the millenniums: the endless—and relationally destructive—blaming of others for our own willful actions.

We, like Adam *in effect*, say to God: "It was the parents *You* gave me!" "It was the genetic history *You* caused me to inherit!" "It was the circumstances and environment that *You* permitted!" "God, You have made it so hard. You can't blame *me!*"

Dumping guilt onto our Maker and others for *our* own choices, not only impacts upon our relationships, it is also personally demeaning. To not take responsibility for our actions—and *reactions*—robs us of the moral dignity for which we were created—and is greatly dishonouring to our glorious Creator.

Some actually develop a *personal identity* based upon a sense of being 'hard done by'. In their eyes, people, situations and things are always against them. This seems to be their lot in life, and it is all 'very unfair'. Such endless, cruel oppression is why they haven't performed, and still don't perform, as their conscience demands. Their cry is: "I am to be pitied, not condemned!" This is another tragic expression of the 'victim mentality'.

Again, the personal pain and hardship that life's circumstances often bring, can be great. No one should minimize the reality of these. But assuming a personal identity of 'victim-hood' is neither a God-honouring nor healthy way to respond.

2) condemning others

We try to godlessly find relief from the accusations of our conscience, by attempting to bring other people under condemnation. "If judgment has got to come upon someone it should be upon *him*, or *her*, or *them!*" This kind of thing is simply another desperate attempt to dump our sense of personal failure, condemnation and shame elsewhere.

A bitter, angry and critical spirit is always the sign of an ailing conscience. It is also the sure sign of a dark and hateful attitude towards God. The 'key concept' of Study 3 spoke of 'an inner thrust of

hostility'. This is always directed primarily towards the Creator, and then towards others who remind us of our guilt before Him.

In a later study it will be seen that there *is* true and righteous anger that is entirely appropriate. But behind such true anger is always the following: personal joy and humility before God; a jealous passion for His honour, glory and praise; humility (as a fellow-sinner) before the one who has been offensive; and affectionate desire for their ultimate blessedness. How very different to the kind of self-obsessed, angry criticism and condemnation referred to above!

The thing we criticize most vehemently in others is, often, where we ourselves—at least in our secret heart—fail the most. And most often our irritation with another person, is because they are openly doing what we work so hard at covering up!

In our next study, while looking at the life of King David, we will see a classic example of the self-righteous rage that rises up, in the midst of personal guilt and un-repentance. The offense he was fiercely condemning in another, was the very thing that he, himself, was guilty of (2 Samuel 12:1–9).

The apostle Paul knew what was behind a condemning and critical spirit. He said:

Romans 2:1

“[You] have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”

All who engage in this kind of guilt-charged condemnation and accusation of others, are, in fact, expressing the likeness Satan—‘the accuser’. He delights in inciting such perversity!

3) performing better

We try to godlessly find relief from the accusations of our conscience, by seeking to improve our own moral performance. “I will *feel* better if I *do* better!” “*This is what I am really like!*”

All of our lives we have been striving to achieve a *righteousness of our own*. We do this in order to *justify* ourselves. That is, to declare ourselves blameless before God and others, and so satisfy the constant demands of the conscience—in our quest to maintain a sense of fallen-human, self-exalting pride.

Romans 10:3

They did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own.

In a later study we will look at the glorious fact of the Father’s ‘free gift of righteousness’ in His presence, through simple faith, alone—the greatest need of every person! Where this gift is not consciously enjoyed, there will always be the powerful inner-drive to proudly establish our own moral status—either through attempting to keep the revealed law of God, or by seeking to uphold general personal values.

But although such *self-righteousness* promises much, it actually delivers little, when it comes to the relief we seek. Every imagined ‘success’ is soon followed by an inevitable failure. Then it’s back to the old despair—and so often, the anger that is expressed towards those we blame for the fall.

This matter of striving for a self-exalting ‘righteousness of our own’ also has much to do with the ‘victor mentality’ referred to above. “Life is hard, and some people are morally weak in it all. But I am a person with *standards*—and I *attain* them!”

In this way, in our ‘performance madness’, there is the constant need to compare our-selves with others. Competition and performance usually go hand in hand. And so we find ourselves saying things like, “I can’t understand how others can do that. It’s something I *never* do.” Or, “I do this, but unfortunately, others don’t.” There will always be ‘bad performers’ with whom we may favourably compare ourselves!

Self-obsessed, *other-person-reducing self-righteousness* is never far away, when there is unresolved guilt nagging at the conscience.

Even as we are exposed to the diversionary mechanisms outlined in this section, we may well be tending to think of how they apply to others—rather than to ourselves! This expression of guilt diversion is such a huge issue for us all.

4) changing the rules

As mentioned in Study 3, we try to godlessly find relief from the accusations of our conscience, by constructing our own laws. “What I did, or what I am doing, is not wrong. Everybody does it—its OK!” Or, just simply, “I don’t believe it is wrong. My conscience doesn’t condemn me. I’m doing what is *right!*”

Others of us don't even bother claiming that our actions were not wrong. We simply say, "I did what I did. It wasn't right, but there will be no judgment. It doesn't matter." Here, the new rule is that we are not accountable to God, only to ourselves. In this there is great pride in saying, "I don't need to excuse myself. I can face the facts, and move on." It all sounds very strong and noble. But—in the depths—a God-given conscience is never satisfied by such proud bravado.

Romans 1:32

—*endless promotion & affirmation of 'the new rules'*

Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

1 Timothy 4:2

—*a conscience which has become hardened against the truth over years of rule-changing*

[There are those] whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

When someone's skin has been badly burned and seared, it becomes completely insensitive to pain—except around the extreme edges of the burn, where it is often *hyper-sensitive*. In the same way, those whose conscience has been seared—having no apparent pain of guilt in the face of moral failure—are often irrationally, and oppressively, *super-sensitive* in other areas. If deeply embedded guilt doesn't appear in one way, it will in another!

We may change the rules, but nothing can be done about the law of God that is 'written on our hearts' by creation.

5) denying the facts

We try to godlessly find relief from the accusations of our conscience by going into 'denial mode'—either blocking out of our minds the true facts of what we've done or *not* done, or attempting to 'retell the story' in a way that will favour our case. Or, in order to avoid the pain of exposure, we just lie!

Denying the facts of our personal failure so as to avoid condemnation—like all of these diversional mechanisms—is a sad, unhealthy and God-dishonouring way to live. And we must say, that it is a particularly self-reducing thing when it is *us* that we are trying to deceive.

6) punishing ourselves

We try to godlessly find relief from the accusations of our conscience, by engaging in various forms of self-punishment. This can be part of the 'performing better' solution—excruciating labour!. Or it can take other forms, such as remorseful self-condemnation, and even deliberate physical self-harm.

The ultimate tragedy in this regard, of course, is the all too frequent result of guilt's unrelieved torture—suicide. What a horrible outcome this is for those who have been created to know and enjoy the personal freedom and fullness that belongs to the image of God!

the futility of our efforts

These then, are the devices that are constantly in operation around us and within us every day, wherever the conscience remains unrelieved. The problem with them all, however, is that they don't work! In fact, being yet further expressions of rebellion against our Maker, they only serve to increase the guilt, and the pain it brings.

Jeremiah 2:22–23

[The Sovereign LORD declares,] "Although you wash yourself with soap and use an abundance of cleansing powder, the stain of your guilt is still before Me ... How can you say, 'I am not defiled'."

Jeremiah 6:14

—*shallow, futile comfort from the godless 'counselors'*

They dress the wound of My people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace.

The 'world' provides an army of counselors and therapists, who endeavour to help their fellow-strugglers find 'guilt-relief'—through the establishment and maintenance of diversional mechanisms. But any peace that is gained from these efforts, is far from what the human spirit longs to know.

Isaiah 59:12

Our offences are ever with us.

Ezekiel 33:10

Our offenses and sins weigh us down.

Psalms 32:3–4

When I kept silent [about my sins], my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

Isaiah 57:20–21

The wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

Psalms 38:3–4

Because of Your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

Psalms 40:12

My sins have overtaken me.

Proverbs 18:14

One's spirit provides strength in times of sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear.

Jonah 4:9

—*the prophet Jonah's guilt-charged anger before God: a debilitating depression*

God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry ... ?"

"It is," he said, "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

Much of our depression can, actually, be an expression of sullen, smouldering anger towards God. We feel that He has done what He *shouldn't* have, or hasn't done what He *should* have. And behind it all is the nagging sense—consciously acknowledged or not—that we *deserve* it to be this way. There is, of course, 'clinical depression'. But this can also, often be complicated and intensified by what we are speaking of here.

Guilt is the most oppressive reality in fallen-human experience. It is understandable that we work so hard and resourcefully to be diverted from it. But it must also be understood that such willful—and God-refusing—action is greatly offensive to the One in whose presence we live.

Thankfully, this is not the end of the story in relation to human guilt and the conscience. Much more will be spoken of in this regard in future studies. WE WILL SEE WHAT GOD HAS DONE—BY HIS INCREDIBLE GRACE—TO BRING US INTO THE SHEER AND UTTER DELIGHT OF ABSOLUTE LIBERTY IN THIS AREA!!!

in the wrath of His love, God personally gives us over to despair producing:

INSECURITY

- in the area of PERSONHOOD

a sense of **lostness & inferiority**

—*diversion: seeking to godlessly establish our own personal calling & significance, in either a positive or negative way*

In our fallenness we have rejected both the Father and our high calling. The result is that we fail so terribly to *live truly* as the likeness of God should. It is no wonder then, that we feel both lost and inferior.

Romans 3:23

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

Romans 3:12

All have turned away, they have together become worthless.

Jeremiah 2:5

They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.

Psalms 22:6

—*the cry of those who have lost any sense of their Creator's esteem, and that of their fellow creatures*

"I am a worm and not a human being, scorned by everyone and despised by the people."

John 8:34

—*the demeaning experience of bondage to habitual patterns of unrighteous and desperate living*

Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Lamentations 5:16

—*the sense of nobility gone*

The crown has fallen from our head.

Jeremiah 50:6

—*part of a society of restless, homeless spirits*

[The LORD declared,] “My people have been lost sheep ... They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.”

the struggle for ‘self-esteem’

Those who refuse the identity they were created to enjoy, find themselves trying to set up other ways of feeling personally significant. ‘Self-esteem’ is sought through *being* a ‘good person’ (related to self-justification), or by being good at *doing* certain things, or *owning* certain things, or having a particular *task* to accomplish. The personal and vocational images we may create for ourselves are almost unlimited!

It is said that some have ‘good self-esteem’ while others have ‘poor self-esteem’. Such terms must be understood in this way: Those who don’t walk with God yet have *good* self-esteem, are those whose diversional mechanisms are, currently, working quite well. In their proud rebellion against their Creator, they feel that their level of personal performance is fine, even excellent! On the other hand, those who also refuse fellowship with God and suffer from *poor* self-esteem are, usually, those whose diversional mechanisms are ineffective. *They* long to be *proudly* rebellious and feel they have excellent personal performance apart from their Maker, but fail miserably!

It must be said, of course, that the ‘good’ self-esteem of fallen-human creatures is very fragile. The slightest look or tone of disdain, or word of criticism, can plunge the ‘self-ennobling rebel’ back into despair. Such a delicate sense of elevated personal status requires constant diligence. It must be vigilantly maintained, regardless of the cost—which is often very high, relationally and otherwise.

All God-refusing pursuit of self-esteem, whether successful or not, is self-obsessed and self-serving. It is the endless preoccupation of those who have guilt before the One who made them.

In this fallen world many suffer painful abuse from others, leaving their godless attempts at self-authentication and self-validation in tatters. Sadly—apart from a transforming experience of God’s grace—such people find themselves desperately striving to salvage a sense of self-worth for the rest of their days.

The tragedy of all godless pursuit of *self-worth* is that it is a pursuit of *self-worship* (self-worth-ship), incited by dark powers. Again, it is both humanly demeaning and greatly offensive to our Maker.

Mention was made before of the *saviour mentality*. Taking on the roles of ‘counselor’, ‘educator’, ‘social worker’, ‘religious worker’, or ‘reliever of the oppressed’, are common ways of bolstering a sense of personal value. The self-affirmation is, “I am somebody because other people *need* me!” Some simply adopt a general role of ‘practical helper’ in order to gain a sense of self-esteem from labouring on behalf of others—usually with view to receiving affirmation for their efforts.

There can be a certain amount of self-exalting ‘control’ exercised in these kinds of saviour roles. In this, the saviour mentality can also be something of a ‘monarch mentality’. Here, ‘his (or her) majesty’ says, “Things are not as they ought to be around here. But I’m just the one who can put it right!”

Of course, the functions of counselor, educator, social worker, religious worker, reliever of the oppressed, and practical helper, aren’t necessarily, a means of godlessly grasping at personal significance and status—and even if they are, it doesn’t mean that such endeavours are bereft of a natural human concern and compassion. But, obviously, all these can also be wonderful ways of truly contributing to a godly fulfillment of other’s needs—in joyous fellowship with the Father and clear-spirited participation in His actions of love.

self esteem at the expense of others

In the outline at the beginning of this section, it was said that we seek to establish our personal calling and significance ‘in either a positive or negative way’. The positive ways have been spelt out already. The negative expressions of our pursuit of self-esteem have to do with ‘eliminating the competition’.

How quickly we find ourselves ready to criticize, or expose as inadequate, foolish or perverse, those who ‘intrude’ into our realm of personal significance—whose presence threatens to ‘rob’ us of the approval, recognition or admiration that we seek. And how relationally destructive, self-degrading and God-dishonouring is such despicable behaviour!

The apostle John spoke of a fellow named Diotrephes who always had to assert himself before others. For him to be less than 'number one' was an intolerable thought.

3 John 9

Diotrephes ... loves to be first.

A competitive and dominating spirit is always evidence of personal insecurity—just one of the relationally unhealthy results of our dark and foolish rebellion.

needing our Maker's way

As was said, godlessly gained self-esteem is extremely fragile, demanding high maintenance. When the mechanisms that are adopted fail—as they, ultimately, always do—the effect is, often, personally devastating, and the anger that results, embittering.

Human beings need to have a deep sense of personal calling, purpose, status, significance and nobility. Without this, there is unbearable personal pain.

Such a rich identity, however, is only truly gained through joyous knowledge of the Father's love and esteem, together with an enthusiastic acceptance of the calling He has given. In later studies it will be seen just how this may be the case—and how liberating it is personally, relationally and vocationally!

in the wrath of His love, God personally
gives us over to despair producing:

INSECURITY

- in the area of CIRCUMSTANCES

a sense of **uneasiness & vulnerability**

—*diversion: seeking to godlessly establish our own physical, financial, material, vocational, relational & political security*

Insecurity is suffered not only personally but also *circumstantially*. The reason for this is that there is an unsettling sense of judgment hanging over the life of one who has guilt before God. In this, the 'people, situations and things' of the Study 3 diagram—which are looked to for *life*—become the context of an un-nerving, inner disturbance. All is potentially under threat.

a nagging sense of impending trouble

The uneasiness and vulnerability that is felt within the circumstances of life is, often, quite irrational. For no conscious reason we may sense that something horrible could happen at any time! God's word confirms that this is precisely how the wicked will feel.

Deuteronomy 28:65–66

The LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life.

Notice that it is the LORD who gives this. It is not merely the natural consequence of human rebellion against the Creator's way. It is what He, Himself, personally gives us over to.

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee though no one pursues.

Leviticus 26:36

I will make their hearts so fearful ... that the sound of a wind-blown leaf will put them to flight.

Psalms 53:5

There they are, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread.

Genesis 4:14

—*a rebel's fearful cry*

"I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

In our rebellion, most of us like to project a carefree, life-loving image. The truth is, though, that—hostile towards our Maker—we are inwardly fearful and disturbed. There is a sense of terror that so quickly rises up within us.

Unfortunately, the circumstantial insecurity we know is so often expressed relationally. Relationships suffer dreadfully through the fear and suspicion that rise up within us.

setting up our ‘security-systems’

Those whose sins have been forgiven—and who delight in the Father’s good and loving purposes and faithful provision—have no need to be fearful in the circumstances of life.

However, all who will not receive God’s grace, and will not walk with Him—trusting and obeying His word—will have to adopt other ways of feeling secure. This is done by giving attention to the areas of circumstantial vulnerability mentioned in the outline above—seeking to *personally establish* physical, financial, material, vocational, relational and political security.

How many and varied are the incessant self-securing efforts of God’s ‘jumpy rebels’!

The Creator’s rebel creatures may, in fact, be very confident in—and proud of—their, diligently, constructed ‘security-systems’. Here are a couple of biblical examples:

Proverbs 18:11

—imagined circumstantial security through money

The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it a wall too high to scale.

Isaiah 28:15

—boasted circumstantial security through smart alliances, with what appears to be strong & invincible

You boast, “We have entered into a covenant with death, with the grave we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place.”

These various self-preserving efforts, however, never effectively remove the feelings of uneasiness and vulnerability. They may bring a temporary sense of circumstantial wellbeing, but the ‘old fears’ soon return.

Nevertheless, there is no stopping the desperate fallen-human spirit from pursuing the security it was created to know. Again, such insistent labours are not only futile, but are greatly offensive to the One whose love and faithfulness is stubbornly refused.

the wickedness & folly of self-securing creatures

To despise the loving care of a sovereign and faithful Creator is neither the way of righteousness nor wisdom. It will always evoke the displeasure of our Maker, and will certainly never bring the *inner rest* that is diligently sought.

Isaiah 30:1

“Woe to the obstinate children,” declares the LORD, “to those who carry out plans that are not Mine, forming an alliance, but not by My Spirit, heaping sin upon sin.”

Job 8:14

What [the godless] trust in is fragile.

Jonah 2:8

—cut off from assurance of the Father’s securing love

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit God’s [unfailing] love for them.

Job 31:24–25, 28

If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, “You are my security,” if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands have gained ... then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.

Ezekiel 7:19, 25

Their silver and gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’S wrath ... They will seek peace in vain.

In a later study we will see how the grace of God secures those who joyously embrace it—bringing a deep and abiding serenity and rest in the midst of all the circumstances of life.

in the wrath of His love, God personally gives us over to despair producing:

FRUSTRATION

- in the area of HUMAN FULFILLMENT

a sense of **deadness & futility**

—*diversion: seeking godless 'full engagement' in significant relationships & action, or meaningless escape; often 'venting'*

Created in the image of God we are vocational beings, with a high and noble purpose to fulfill. As such, we must be *fully engaged* in the fulfillment of our 'high human calling'. To refuse to be in such *life-giving action* brings a sense of deadness and futility—leaving us anxiously seeking some other means of being enlivened, revived and fulfilled.

whatever it takes

The drive to experience fullness of life is very powerful in every human being. There is, virtually, no limit to the mental, emotional and physical energy—and material resources—that will be invested towards this end.

It was seen earlier how we attempt to godlessly establish our own *personal calling and significance*. When it comes to the *pursuit of human fulfillment*, it is precisely the same things that are looked to.

For example, if our sense of *identity* is found in what we do for a job—or in any other sphere of special interest—then *that* will be where a major part of our personal energies, and material resources, are expended. In this, the focus will be upon *full engagement* in significant relationships and action within that area.

Here again we have an illustration of the Study 3 diagram: total investment of our energies and resources in *people, situations and things*, in order to *get* from *them* what has been refused from the Father. The unhappy outcome of all this is, often, personally and relationally unhealthy *driven-ness, obsessive-ness* and the need to *control*.

Where there is no *significant relationship or action* to be engaged in, the option is then usually mere 'meaningless escape'. That is, spending hours fully absorbed in things that achieve nothing, except to provide some sense of immediate personal enlivenment.

Whether seemingly significant, or meaningless, these are the things to which we *give* ourselves, in order to find the fullness our humanity demands.

the 'belly business'

A common way of 'self-medication' or 'self-enlivenment' is 'comfort eating'. In this, a person is driven to find relief from a sense of personal deadness, loneliness, emptiness, futility and frustration, by gluttonous or intensely focused *food consumption*—a pursuit of life-enhancing 'sensory experience'. Here it is a case of despairing, and often angry, hearts—or those attempting to keep such states at bay—grasping at emotional pleasure through stimulation of the sense of taste.

Philippians 3:19

—*those who look for life in food*

Their god is their stomach.

This is expressed today not only in overeating, but also in an ever-increasing obsession with tantalizingly, exotic cooking techniques. Such fascination with food and taste sensation is so often, evidence of a humanity that feels the pain of deep, guilt-charged frustration.

The joys of taste and flavour, of course, are not wrong in themselves. They are good gifts of a blessed Creator, who loves to see His children have pleasure in the abundance of His provision. It is only when these good gifts are pursued as a means of godless, personal comfort and enlivenment, that they become objects of idolatrous worship.

frustration's inevitable return

The same diversionary failure experienced in other areas is also known here. Although the stimulation arising from our efforts produces a sense of being truly alive for a time, the cry soon returns: "What's missing? Why do I feel so dead, lonely, empty and frustrated?" "Why is life so hard, and in the end, futile!"

The zeal of the rebel is unending, but will never bring the desired reward. Any sense of personal fullness always has the seeds of frustration in it—the fruit of which inevitably appears before too long.

This, of course, keeps the old guilt-charged hostility towards our Creator smouldering—and at times, fanned into full flame! Anger towards others is merely a symptom of this. Bitter anger, as well as fretfulness and anxiety, are clear indications that we have idolatrous mechanisms that are under threat.

In the outline above it is mentioned that recurring frustration is often expressed through ‘venting’. We are not all venters. Some of us just ‘bottle things up’ inside ourselves—im-plovers rather than ex-plovers! But whether the inner rage is outwardly or inwardly expressed, there are always personal and relational consequences. Those around us are either verbally abused through ‘explosion’, or relationally deprived through ‘implosion’.

In the pursuit of a *full engagement* in significant relationships and action, relationships—for all kinds of reasons—can be frustrated. Sometimes, they are non-existent to begin with. Either way, the tendency is to then press on *individualistically*, ‘content’ with focus on the *action* itself. That is, being totally engaged with ‘it’, without regard for ‘them’. This is a tragically barren and dehumanizing way of pursuing personal fulfillment.

Thankfully, we will see in future studies how we may—in the grace of God—live freely, truly and joyously in the midst of relational difficulty.

We have been created to participate in the fullness of our Maker’s own life and vocational action. In this light, the matter of personal frustration—with its sense of deadness and futility—is certainly a painful aspect of the human dilemma. Again, the Scriptures graphically describe this situation:

Jeremiah 2:13

[The LORD says,] “My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

Haggai 1:9

—*the frequent experience of the self-obsessed*

You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little.

Isaiah 44:24–25

—*frustrated ‘life strategies’*

I am the LORD who has made all things ... who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense.

Ecclesiastes 1:8

—*apart from true sight & hearing, nothing is ever enough*

The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

The Father loves to fill the spiritual senses of His children, in His presence. When this is not known, no amount of physical, sensory stimulation will truly satisfy.

Ecclesiastes 1:15

What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

We may engage in all kinds of innovative programs to ‘straighten out’ or ‘fill up’. But it is only full and active engagement in ‘the high human calling’, that will create the desired outcome. Only this can bring the level of human fulfillment we were made for.

Isaiah 28:20

—*frustrated pursuit of personal rest*

The bed is too short to stretch out on, the blanket too narrow to wrap around you.

Proverbs 4:19

—*the perplexing nature of the rebel’s frustration*

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.

Proverbs 13:15

The way of the unfaithful is hard.

Those who are unfaithful to their Maker—refusing to find their delight in Him and His way—sooner or later taste ‘the toughness of life’.

Isaiah 31:1

Woe to those who ... do not look to the Holy One.

Psalms 146:9

The LORD ... frustrates the ways of the wicked.

Ezekiel 20:25

[The LORD said] "I ... gave them over to statutes that were not good and laws they could not live by."

How much frustration our self-created laws produce! In the areas of vocational activity, marriage and family life, and rest and recreation, only the law of God is 'functionally good'.

Jeremiah 17:5-6

This is what the LORD says: "Cursed are those ... whose hearts turn away from the LORD. They will be like a bush in the wastelands."

When we live against the way of God, we are actually living against ourselves!

Proverbs 19:3

—*inevitable guilt-charged hostility towards the Holy One*

One's own folly leads to ruin, yet the heart rages against the LORD.

Ecclesiastes 10:19

—*the philosophy of some who are without true joy*

"A feast is made for laughter, wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything".

How much hope is poured into such objects of personal enlivenment—but with so little return, that would satisfy the deepest cry of the human heart.

Ecclesiastes 7:6

—*the meaningless noise of empty relationships*

Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools.

Ecclesiastes 7:4

The heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

God-refusing 'fools' must spend all the time they can, seeking personal freedom and fullness in the 'house of pleasure'—with the many and varied shapes that such an abode takes.

Isaiah 55:2

—*a message from our Maker*

Why spend money on what [does not sustain], and your labour on what does not satisfy?

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11

—*the testimony of one who gave mere 'horizontal-ism' his best effort, pursuing emotional pleasure & human fullness through sensory stimulation, material possession & personal elevation*

[Pleasure] proved to be meaningless. "Laughter," I said, "is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?" I tried cheering myself with wine; ... I undertook great projects; ... I amassed silver and gold for myself; ... I became greater by far than anyone in [my city] before me. ... I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labour, and this was the reward for my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

substance abuse, an empty promise of personal fullness

The frustration of which we are speaking often drives a person to alcohol or drug abuse. But these never bring the fullness of joy or personal peace that our spirits demand.

Isaiah 56:12

—*alcohol, used as a false promise of life*

"Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better."

Although alcohol may be received as a good gift of the Creator—to be enjoyed with dignity—it is no 'cure for our ills' or 'giver of life'. No matter how frantically personal relief and fullness is sought through alcoholic consumption, the old enemy—guilt-charged frustration—is never far away.

Proverbs 23:29

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? ... Those who linger over wine.

Isaiah 28:7

—*the demeaning nature of alcohol abuse*

They stagger from beer and are befuddled by wine.

Drunkenness leaves its victims without either human dignity or true enlivenment.

The Scriptures don't speak of *drug abuse* specifically. But it is clearly covered by the statements regarding alcohol. Both have to do with chemically altered mental and emotional states.⁴

In a future study more will be said regarding substance abuse. There, we will look at the matter of addictive behaviours—and the freedom God gives from them by his grace.

the confident claims of some

There are, of course, those whose diversional mechanisms seem to work very well for them, and who insist that their experience of life is all that could be desired. The reality is that such people have—at best—settled for what is so far short of the 'human fulfillment' for which they were created. This will be increasingly clear as we continue through the series.

in the wrath of His love, God personally
gives us over to despair producing:

FEAR OF DEATH

- in the area of ETERNITY

a sense of **dread & doom**

—*diversion: seeking to remove the fact of coming judgment,
through religion or philosophy, or just godless activism*

Fear of death is, in fact, the fear of judgment. It has been said rightly that people are not afraid to die because they *must* die, but because they know they *deserve* to die.

In this way, fear of death is really the same as 'insecurity in the area of circumstances'. The one being fear of judgment in time, the other, in eternity. We could also say that 'circumstantial insecurity', ultimately—in some of the areas mentioned in that part of the outline—involves the fear of death as well.

Fear of death always lies just below the surface of fallen-human consciousness. It may be denied, but is there all the same. Life can be filled with busyness—'godless activism'—and the mind convinced of either eternal nothingness, or theories of an after-life. But until the conscience is forever cleansed and calmed, death will always be—at core—a dark foe to be feared.

Sometimes the pain of a godless life can make death a morbidly longed for alternative. The sullen, brooding cry being, "Any kind of after-life, or a despair-ending nothingness, would be better than what I know now!" This, of course, doesn't make death a less daunting prospect. It just means that living is less desirable.

Where the grace of God is not delighted in, fear of death is deep in the human heart, destroying personal serenity and tranquility—despite attempts to maintain a bright and cheerful spirit regarding the whole matter.

moral bondage through the fear of death

A frequently intruding fear of death, actually, keeps rebellious human creatures in constant personal enslavement.

Hebrews 2:15

All their lives [they] were [satanically] held in slavery by their fear of death.

What is the slavery referred to here? It is our compulsive given-ness to the diversional mechanisms we've been describing—coming out of the *idolatrous passions* of Study 3.

These are desperately engaged in as final accountability to an offended Creator approaches. The sense of an ultimate reckoning—however expressed—is never far from the consciousness of rebellious humanity.

The dark shadow of *guilt*, and its eternal forebodings, is persistently cast over the fallen-human spirit—pressing us to overcome its damning power, and the insecurity and frustration it produces. Nothing drives us more forcefully to establish our own self-righteousness, and to fulfill our self-extending, self-securing and self-enlivening passions.

⁴ Here we are not, of course, speaking of professionally prescribed medications. There may be times when these are necessary, due to conditions that cause chemical imbalances.

Thankfully, future studies will show how *the thrilling realities of God's grace* may liberate us in this regard. The *total acquittal* of our sins, *intimate communion* with the Father, the assurance of *eternal blessedness*—together with other equally wonderful treasures—will be seen to make slavish, diversional mechanisms irrelevant!

the inescapable reality of a coming judgment

Final accountability to our Maker is a not a pleasant prospect for those who live in rebellion against Him. But it is, nevertheless, what every person will ultimately be confronted with.

Hebrews 9:27

People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

Romans 2:5

Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed.

Romans 2:8–9

For those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil.

Romans 2:16 [NRSV]

God ... will judge the secret thoughts of all.

2 Thessalonians 1:9

They will be punished with everlasting [ruin] and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His [transforming] power.

2 Thessalonians 2:12

All will be condemned who have not believed in the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

2 Peter 2:3

Their condemnation has been hanging over them.

Matthew 25:46

They will go away to eternal punishment.

Such a dark and dreadful eternal future is what is called 'the second death' (Revelation 21:8). Those who remain in defiance against their Creator, have much more to fear than dying physically.

Revelation 14:11

The smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.

Daniel 12:2

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake ... to shame and everlasting contempt.

All this sounds so horrible. But it is, in fact, the establishment of justice in God's universe. As was said in Study 1: "If He did not pursue the revelation of His glory in all the earth, nor finally judge those who despise it, that would be *great unrighteousness!*"

It was said earlier in *this* study, that in life before the Living God there are only two substantial and enduring possibilities: firstly, *delight in Him*—out of a clear conscience and a free spirit—or, secondly, the *despair* that is an inevitable result of living against Him and His way.

The reality is that both of these will endure into eternity!

Tragically, for those who die still in unrepentant rebellion, it will be the second that is known—unrelenting despair. They will forever bear the torment of their guilt, with the awful sense of shame, lostness, inferiority, deadness and futility it brings. All this will be borne out into *an eternal darkness*, with no possibility of *diversion*. Each one, forever *given over* to the terrors of their own now, sharply animated conscience—which is no longer able to rationalize or dismiss the truth.

This is the ultimate human tragedy—the 'hell' of which our holy Maker, the Righteous One, has given repeated and earnest warning. The rebel, truly, has good cause to feel a sense of dread and doom in the face of physical death.

Deuteronomy 32:28–29

—*the folly of rebels mindlessly headed for judgment*

They are ... without sense, there is no discernment in them. If only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be!

Again, we can look forward to what is to come in later studies. It will be seen that death does not have to be a *dark foe* to be feared. Rather—by God's great grace—it may be a *dear friend* to be eagerly anticipated! We will be told of an indescribably joyous reality beyond the grave, which may wonderfully enrich our lives every day—regardless of present difficulties.

CONCLUSION

Our good and faithful Creator has intended each of us to be *free* from GUILT in our CONSCIENCE—not having to restlessly-struggle with a sense of *condemnation* and *shame*. To be free from INSECURITY as a PERSON—not having to restlessly-struggle with a sense of *lostness* and *inferiority*. To be free from INSECURITY in the CIRCUMSTANCES of life—not having to restlessly-struggle with a sense of *uneasiness* and *vulnerability*. To be free from FRUSTRATION in our pursuit of HUMAN FULFILLMENT—not having to restlessly-struggle with a sense of *deadness* and *futility*. And He intended each of us to be free from FEAR OF DEATH in the face of ETERNITY—not having to restlessly-struggle with a sense of *dread* and *doom*.

But persisting in rebellion, such freedom is beyond our grasp. We are, in fact, given over to the oppressive and dark dominion of the world, the flesh and the devil.

The world will, of course, continue to help its people godlessly set up their personal systems of diversion and self-help. The flesh will pursue these, and the devil and his demon powers will incessantly inspire them. But the dilemma of a fallen humanity will never be resolved on that basis—and the endless restless-struggle will continue, even into eternity.

Having come to this point, we are definitely ready now for the *good news* part of the series! These first four studies have been an indispensable exposure to the reality of who God is, what we were created to be, what we have become, and the *impact* our rebellion has upon us.

All this may have been rather confronting and—as said already—even, deeply disturbing. If that is the case, there is great hope. Reality has dawned!

Now, the studies that follow will bring an increasingly wonderful revelation of God's incredible goodness, mercy and grace towards us. We will see all that He has done to put away our guilt and shame forever, and to set us free to walk with Him as His dearly loved children—in the blessedness of the high call He has given, and in glad expectation of a future that is beyond our imagining!