

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 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 and death of humanity* that took place at the beginning of time.

Tragedies happen every day, always bringing great personal loss to those involved in them. But we will see that the 'Moral Fall' of humankind in the beginning is, by far, THE MOST TRAGIC EVENT OF ALL!!! It is one that 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?" and "*Why am I like I am?*"

Although fallen, we are nevertheless capable of much that is grand and noble. For this reason revelation of the loathsome nature of our fallen state is often strongly resisted. It is, however, a fact 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 through the Fall every person born into the world has deeply embedded within them a principle of *moral corruption*. To bluntly face this is an unbearable thing for those who are inwardly pressed, by nature, to be something so much more magnificent.

It must be understood, however, that apart from a personal acknowledgment 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 delights 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, then, 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 Moral Fall': the self-exaltation
& death of humanity)

- **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 essentially change. We were still by nature structured to be children, creatures and servants of our Father, Creator and King. But now our nature is one which has at its core a pervading and powerful tendency towards rebellion and sin—a dark reality defined and declared in the following scriptures:

1 John 3:4b

Sin is lawlessness.

1 John 5:17a

All wrongdoing is sin.

James 4:17

If anyone ... knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it [for them it is sin].

Romans 14:23b

Everything that does not come from faith [in the Living and True God] is sin.

2 Chronicles 6:36b

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 2:29b

—*an undeniable fact regarding us all*

“You have all rebelled against Me”, declares the LORD.

Ezekiel 2:3b

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

Ezekiel 20:8a

“They rebelled against Me and would not listen to Me.”

Psalms 78:56a

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

Isaiah 63:10a

They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 3:19d

[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 longsuffering is constantly tested—as His Spirit is grieved—by the dark thrust of rebellion in those He has created in His likeness.

Isaiah 59:12b–13a

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. Our Creator—in His divine Self-giving and yearning desire to bless—has entrusted us as His stewards with all that we are and have. And He has done this so that we may be joyously with Him in His unsearchably great and wise purposes of love. The rebellion of a human being against Him, then, is indeed unthinkable treachery! Such heartless betrayal of our Father, Creator and King's trust is an enormously grievous assault against His love—an offence that troubles and unsettles the human spirit day after day.

lifelessly & restlessly enslaved to unrighteousness

In Study 5—as we look at the Story of Redemption—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 (to ‘wrong relational action’). That is, a desperate pursuit of *life* that is sought *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 perfect, 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 had made known to him. This was how a true human creature should live 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 (Genesis 2:16–17).

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

Genesis 3:4–5

—*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.”

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

humankind’s tragic ascent / descent

The intruder said to the couple, “You will not die. It will be the exact opposite. You really *will be like God*—and you will live! You will be able to determine what is good or evil, pleasant or unpleasant, life-giving or not. It will be for you to decide on every occasion, apart from dependence upon your Creator.

So then, *look* at the fruit of this tree, and do what is in you to do—make your own logical and intelligent choice. What do you see?”

- It’s ‘good for food’—life-giving *stimulation*! It will thrill your senses!
- It’s ‘a delight to the eyes’—life-giving *possession*! You can *see* how magnificent it is. Of course you *want* it!
- It’s ‘to be desired to make one wise’—life-giving, *personal elevation*! You’ll be one who really does have *the key* to a noble humanity—able to walk tall on the earth!

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.

They *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 a ‘god-like’ status,

apart from a true familial, creaturely and vocational fellowship with their Maker. And 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* into a god-like status was, in fact, a tragic *descent!* That is why this event is referred to as the Fall.

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 principle will be gained in a later part of the series when we see what God has done to reverse it all!

Romans 5:17a

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 sin, but we also—inheriting his sinful nature—have ourselves lived sinfully before God. This will become extremely evident as we proceed through our present study.

In choosing sin we have become its servants and receive a return for our service.

Romans 6:23a

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: an experience of *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 relational action* according to the way, or law, of His own nature as Father, Creator and King; and that as the Righteous One He gloriously 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, 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 AND RESTLESS ENSLAVEMENT TO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. HOW TRAGIC!!!

This study and the next will tell the sad story of the relentless outworking of this dark reality—both within and among us.

As already stated, such an exposure may not be easy to receive. But to take every detail of it to heart is, *indispensable* to an experience of the freedom of spirit and fullness of life that we all yearn to know.

The aim of this study is not to condemn us, nor leave us wallowing in a raw awareness of our degraded state. Rather, it is to provide an understanding that will enable us to know the wonder of the Father's goodness, mercy and grace towards us in His Son. And in this to have a *new capacity* to live in the blessedness of fulfilling our high human calling—progressively now and totally in the life to come.

Ephesians 2:1b

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 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'.

So, then, let's proceed with our task of spelling out the grave fact of our human tragedy.

now lifelessly and 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 intimate communion with the Father and richly vocational oneness with Him.

our mind darkened, & heart guiltily & defensively hardened, having:

**** a deadening, 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 divine 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 3:7b–8

—*the loss of an 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 an unnatural *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 have this assurance 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 can delight in all that the Creator makes known of Himself. We saw in the previous study that when our conscience is un-condemned, our spirit is free and our heart is pure, and so, *full of desire* for fellowship with Him.

The problem for sinful human beings is that, apart from an experience of divine grace, we cannot bear to receive what the Holy One reveals of Himself—that is, the way He actually is! 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 bring 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 but it also causes a powerful reaction of *hostility* towards Him. “Don’t You condemn *me!*” is the angry, fearful and guilt-charged cry. Such a hostile spirit is often expressed as just 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 into antagonism, and even, 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 8:7a

The [sinful mind] is hostile to God.

Hosea 5:4a

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

Job 35:9a–10a

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

Psalms 53:2–3a

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 (e.g. one who is an impersonal creative force, or 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 1:4b

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

Isaiah 3:8b–9a

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 so, 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, intimate fellowship with our Maker.

always choosing to refuse His holy presence,
firstly, with a dark spirit 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 26:10b

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

Hosea 5:4b

They do not acknowledge the LORD.

Habakkuk 1:7b

They promote their own honour.

Our proud, fallen-human heart is always seeking to gather '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, then 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 which plagues the rebellious human spirit.

Daniel 5:23b

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

Jeremiah 5:21–22a, 23–24a

"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 3a

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

Isaiah 29:16

—*an outrageous denial of our creaturely reality*

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 28:5a

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

Jeremiah 44:10a

They have not humbled themselves or shown reverence.

Exodus 10:3b

[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 and desire!

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 an adoring spirit of childlike trust, grateful affection and unwavering 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 most tragic and perverse reality.

always choosing to refuse His holy presence,
secondly, with a dark spirit 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 and guilt-charged 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 directly comes upon them. 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, within the Scriptures—there is the ever-present operation of ‘general revelation’ through the creation.¹

Our Father-Creator-King is all of 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 personally confronting 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 and in His presence is to be daily exposed 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 19:1–4a

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 6:3b

The whole earth is full of His glory.

The entire creation gives vibrant witness to the wonder of who He is and what He does—the Creator who is personally and dynamically present to all He has made.

Psalm 33:5b

—*the extraordinarily functional provision that is set before our eyes!*
The earth is full of His unfailing love.

¹ We will see in Study 5 and beyond how God has made Himself known in special ways, apart from general revelation.

Acts 14:17

He has not left Himself without testimony. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with [gladness].

Our Maker's lavish supply of all that is good and excellent for our sustenance and pleasure, truly is, a powerful witness to His great kindness and generosity.

Job 36:25b

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.

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 17:26–28a

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.

But for all of the rich fabric of general revelation there is strong, inner resistance to any authentically faithful response to the Holy One.

Job 33:14

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

Psalms 14:1a / 53:1a

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

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 formed. But what keeps us from knowing God is not problems of the mind but our hardness of heart towards Him. Sinful human beings truly do have—of themselves—an inbuilt resistance to the truth.

Romans 1:18b

[The godless continually grasp hold of and suppress the truth in unrighteousness].

Ezekiel 12:2b

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 30:11b

[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 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 childlike 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 refusing to respond to the revelation of God—through either His creation or His divine word. The link between bitterness towards others and inability to know the truth will be explored in later studies.

always choosing to refuse His holy presence,
thirdly, with a dark spirit of:

- ingratitude

(‘He has done nothing for me’)

The revelation of God’s love in goodness, mercy and grace toward 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 ‘the God Who Is’—the Holy One—should be among the most natural and prevalent of all human emotions. But, sadly, 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 ever 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 1:21a

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 5:12

—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!

There are many, of course, who have come to see the enormous psychological benefits of 'an attitude of gratitude', and seek to live in positive thankfulness. This may be towards an impersonal 'Universe' rather than the 'Living God' of whom we've been speaking. Or it may merely be a maintained 'functional attitude' in the light of general relational and circumstantial benefits enjoyed. But this falls so far short of the 'adoring spirit of grateful affection' towards the Father, spoken of in Study 2: that 'inner music of thankfulness for the reality of His love'.

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 life, refusing to acknowledge the goodness of a sovereign Father in the midst of it all.

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 38:2a

—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 11:20b

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

Numbers 14:27a

—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 34:37b

[The wicked multiply their] words against God.

Malachi 3:13

“You have spoken arrogantly against Me,” says the LORD.

Jeremiah 2:29a

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

Job 40:8b

[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

Hostility towards our Maker 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, can find ourselves so quickly giving way to a refusal of His presence and shameful ingratitude.

always choosing to refuse His holy presence,
fourthly, with a dark spirit of:

- defiance

(‘His will, way and pleasure mean nothing to me’)

Although God’s good purposes and commands are always for our ultimate benefit and pleasure, a rebellious humanity 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 35:14b

[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 65:2–3a

“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 36:4b

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

Isaiah 5:24b

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, His 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.

There is no knowledge of God where there is not an inner delight in and desire for His will, His way and His pleasure.

This first section of Study 3 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 MERCY AND GRACE!!!**

The second section of this study will 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.

lifelessly and restlessly enslaved to unrighteousness—being:

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 and intimate fellowship with the Holy One, the exact opposite is the case. He is continually *dishonoured!*

Romans 2:24b

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

Ezekiel 36:23a

[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 joyous, awe-filled esteem!

Still capable of so much that's grand, yet refusing His face there is:

*** a horrible 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. But the tragedy of our fallen situation as rebellious children, creatures and servants is that—even within our innate, human grandeur—instead of being glorious reflections and representatives of our Father, Creator and King, we become, in so many ways, 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 3:9b–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 1:29a

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.

These are the various, tragic forms a fallen humanity has taken. Surely 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.

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

- unholy affections

(in our inner being ***a polluted spring of moral impurity: strong, idolatrous passion*** for the stimulation of sensory experience, the possession of magnificent things & the elevation of personal status; which is also then within us ***a polluted spring of relational idolatry: self-serving, fallen-human love*** that's incessantly focused upon people, situations & things, *grasping* for what is not received from above—all making our heart more corrupt than we realize)

In Study 2 we spoke of God having the 'holy affection' of great joy and delight in all that He is and does. And we saw that, as the image of God, we may spontaneously share with Him in this as *we delight* in the awesome revelation of His unsearchably great perfections as the Holy One—particularly as they have spoken powerfully to our deepest human needs.

But also, incredibly, we saw that in this we then have the capacity to *reflect* the glory of two other divine, holy affections: an *inner spring* of HIS OWN MORAL PURITY'S JEALOUS PASSION and of HIS OWN LOVE'S OUTFLOWING, YEARNING DESIRE TO BLESS!!!

The wonder of our high calling as the image of God was seen in that HE DELIGHTS TO CAUSE THESE VERY *DIVINE* AFFECTIONS TO BE ALWAYS DYNAMICALLY STIRRING WITHIN THE DEPTHS OF OUR *HUMAN BEING*!!!

It was also seen that out of these two glorious, indwelling realities *all other* reflection of our Maker's glory arises—enabling us to fulfill our high and awesome calling to be visible images of the invisible God on the earth! And we saw that the more fully we enjoy the holy affection of *an inner spring of great delight in Him*, the more these other two holy affections become, at once, *a mighty, inner spring of grand, vocational action within us*.

But the tragedy is that now all this is horrendously reversed. The inner spring of great delight in God has become A GUILT-CHARGED AND DARK-SPIRITED *INNER THRUST OF HOSTILITY* TOWARDS HIM!!! And the inner spring of His own moral purity's jealous passion and His own love's outflowing yearning desire to bless, has become THE POLLUTED SPRING OF A *MORAL IMPURITY'S* IDOLATROUS PASSION AND A *FALLEN LOVE'S* IDOLATROUS RELATIONAL GRASPING!!!

This is what is at the heart of that definitive statement of our mis-representation of the Holy One in Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

a moral impurity's idolatrous passion

Yes, there has indeed been a horrendous reversal within the inner being of the image of God. In the absence of true worship there is tragically now *a polluted spring of moral impurity*. And in this, our hearts are incessantly full of all kinds of *idolatrous passions*: desiring to *gain* from the *creation* what is not being freely and fully *received* from our *Creator*. IDOLATRY IS SIMPLY GIVING ULTIMATE *WORTH* TO, AND SEEKING TO GAIN *LIFE* FROM, SOMETHING OTHER THAN GOD HIMSELF. We will see that this

always leads to increasing frustration, and so, increased *intensity* and *impurity* in desire and action.

A personal moral impurity has—above all else—to do with idolatrous desire. All outward acts of impurity are the fruit of this.

1 John 2:16 speaks of three things that characterize the impure drive of the fallen-human heart—the very things which the first couple tragically chose to grasp after:

- ***the lust of the flesh***
a wrong desire to *gain life* through *sensory experience*: ‘what I want to *do*’ (godlessly seeking emotional pleasure through the *stimulation* of our physical senses—what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell).
- ***the lust of the eyes***
a wrong desire to *gain life* through *magnificent things*: ‘what I want to *have*’ (godlessly seeking emotional pleasure through the *possession* of things that catch our eye—to gain the sense of identity, security and enlivenment that these promise).
- ***the pride of life***
a wrong desire to *gain life* through *personal status*: ‘what I want to *be*’ (godlessly seeking emotional pleasure through *personal elevation*—to have a capacity to boast and a proud place to stand in the eyes of others: affirmed, recognized and admired).

It will become clear as the series progresses that an enjoyment of *sensory experience*, *magnificent things* and *personal status* is entirely legitimate. The Father delights 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*.

As with that primal pair, whenever such passion rises up within us—with the God-dreading guilt it brings—fellowship with the Holy One is lost. And until an experience of His mercy and grace releases us from guilt’s culpable moral pain, it will be these passions that are the continual wellspring of our humanity: a reflexive and desperate drive within us to *gain life* from what is created, apart from our Creator.

In the pursuit of our passions we, in effect, put up a ceiling between ourselves and God saying, “This world is what I want—not You!”

Such 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-human corruption

Fallen society generally insists that people are basically good. But the word of God reveals 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 all areas of human life. As has been rightly said, “The seed of every evil is in every human heart.” The shape that such evil takes is determined largely by personal circumstances; and it is only various cultural and societal constraints that tend to limit its more, vile expressions.

Often we hear it said, “Oh, but I have a good heart.” But no, that’s the worst part of us! Genesis 8:21b

—*God’s evaluation of the entire, fallen-human race*
Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.

Psalm 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 [what is earthly in you]: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed [or covetousness], which is idolatry.

Romans 7:8, 18 [NASB]

—*a universal reality*

[Sin] produced in me [greedy desire] of every kind. ... I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my [fleshly fallen-humanity].

Mark 10:18b

[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 almost anything except intimacy with our Maker and the honour of His name.

This is not to say that all of us are all the time in the grip of all these things. What is being said is, that these are the things which very quickly intrude into our hearts, pervade our thinking and, at least to some degree or another, determine the way we speak and act. Jesus actually said that, morally, to have an adulterous desire or thought is to make one guilty of adultery itself! He said that the same principle applies to the rising up within us of self-righteous anger etc. Whatever intrudes into the heart and the mind actually pollutes our entire being before the Holy One!

Having received the truths outlined in this study and those that follow—and having been liberated into the grace of God—none of us would ever be able to say, “I don’t know how people can act like that!” If we know ourselves truly, such an exclamation will freeze upon our lips before it is uttered—or giving it voice will sound so foolish to our ears. There is no one who may not truly say in the face of any expression of human evil, “But for the grace of God there go I.”

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 4:19b

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

Isaiah 1:2b, 4a

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

Daniel 12:10b

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* magnificent things and *elevate* our personal status. And all this truly does amount to a kind of 'passion-madness'.

a foreign fountain

The polluted spring of idolatrous passion in the fallen-human heart is a horrible and undeniable reality—as said above, horrendous in its effects. Such inner corruption is *foreign* to the One who is our God and Father, and greatly offensive to Him.

1 John 2:16

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

These universal and personally dominating drives are clearly not *from* Him, and neither do they produce within us an authentic representation of His likeness.

a fallen-love's relational idolatry

With that polluted spring of idolatrous passion welling up within us, the immediate result is, of course, a tragic outworking of this in our relationships! It is time now, then, to explore the all-pervasive and powerful presence of this catastrophic, fallen-human reality within our Creator's world; one that is often as subtle as it is evil.

Created in the image of God, human beings are deeply relational creatures, needing to richly receive and express love. But within our fallen-human situation there are now only two kinds of love possible as we relate to others:

Firstly, there is **divine love**.² As we've been seeing, this is the love that is the wellspring of the Divine Eternal-Being, with its boundlessly rich and irrepressible outflowing! And for us as the image of God, an expression of it comes out of that innerspring of full-hearted delight in Him and the holy passion this then produces—a spontaneous and glorious manifestation within us of His own outflowing, yearning desire to bless!

Secondly, there is **fallen-human love**. This love is the product of a tragic, guilt-charged absence of communion with the One who is love itself—resulting in the moral impurity of indwelling idolatrous-passion, with its grasping human-centred approach to others.

Such fallen-human love will *give* generously of time, energy and material resources, so that it may *gain* what is not being *received* from above. That is, to achieve its own

² This is often known as *agape* love. *Agape* is the Greek word most commonly used for divine love in the New Testament, although there are others that describe elements of it. After we've spoken of the liberating and life-giving action of God towards us in His Son, later studies will fill out in great detail the nature of divine love, and the way it may be manifested within and through our humanity—as those who are called to be the divine image and likeness in our Maker's world.

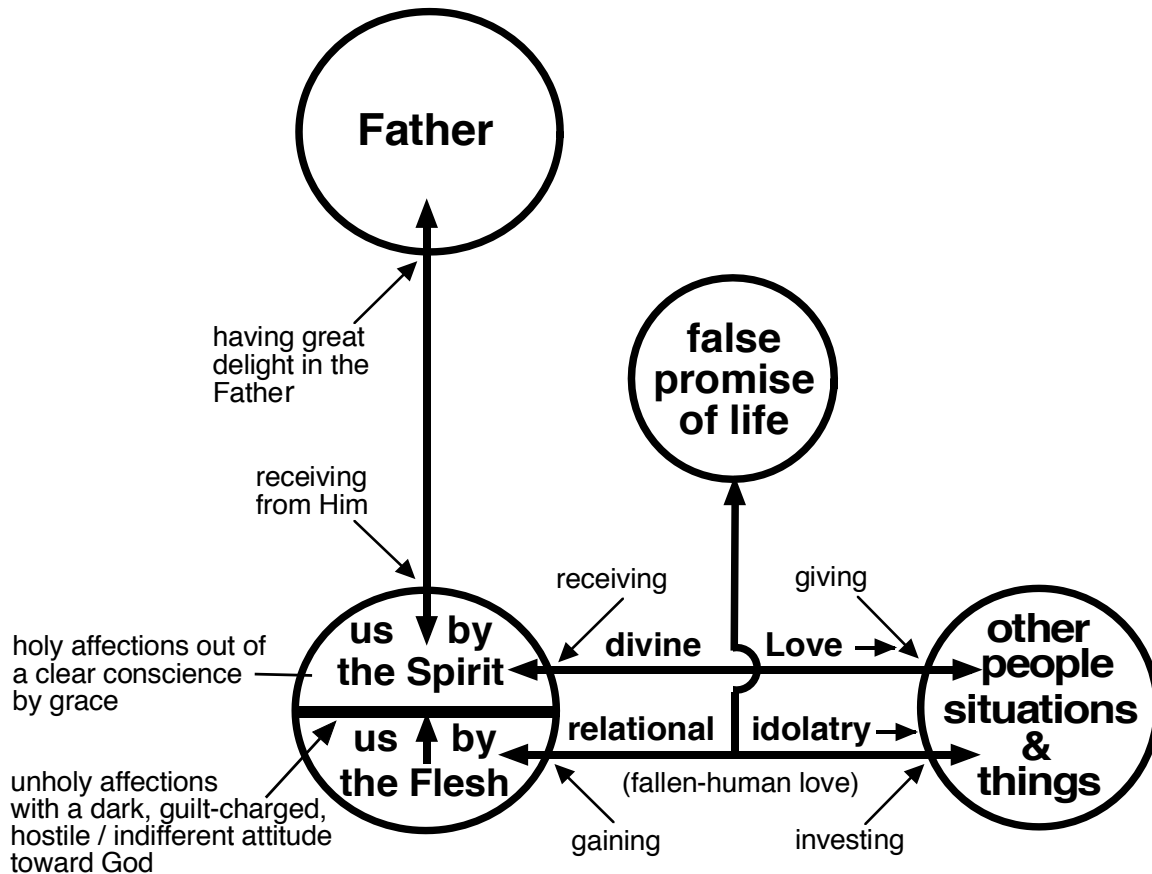
God-refusing agendas: self-justification³ (seeking to satisfy the conscience through ‘right action’), self-validation (seeking an affirmation of one’s personhood), self-benefit (seeking to enhance one’s personal prospects) and self-fulfilment (seeking to be alive in some grand human enterprise—or merely in the achievement of sensory satisfaction). Sometimes fallen-human love’s action is openly self-indulgent, but at 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 might find comfort and happiness. It may even be willing to *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*-centred 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. With all of its magnificent expressions of self-giving it is, nevertheless, inherently idolatrous and self-serving. Although passionate and relationally intense, such love will never result in the freedom and fullness we were created for. Above all, it is greatly grievous and offensive to the One who made us—and who, every moment gives us ‘life and breath and everything else’ as His representatives in His world!

The following diagram illustrates the vast difference between a participation in divine love and the exercise of fallen-human love. It uses terms like ‘by the Spirit’ and ‘by the flesh’, both of which will be explained further on 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.

³ The term ‘justification’ will be a significant one in future studies. Simply put it means to be ‘declared right’ in one’s desires, thoughts, words or actions.



Above the line in the bottom-left circle is 'us by the Spirit'. Here having a clear conscience by God's grace through forgiveness, and enjoying a rich participation in the life of the Son (as Study 6 will show), our delight is in the Father. Greatly 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 outflowing 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 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 'the God Who Is' because of guilt before Him, and they *never* have true fellowship with Him. All who are in such a tragic, lifelong state are clearly, in urgent need of receiving God's great mercy and grace—having their sins forgiven and being made alive to Him forever!

Those who *do* know God and *have* been made alive to Him by His mercy, always—as will be seen later—have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. But also, for them, wherever there is unresolved guilt—when the liberating gift of forgiveness is not being enjoyed—their heart defensively hardens towards God, His indwelling Spirit is resisted and fellowship with Him is 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'). We'll see later that in such a state they greatly feel the impact of grieving the Holy Spirit within them—finding

themselves under their Father's good 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 relationship to the creation—people, situations and things—in order to *gain* those various elements of emotional satisfaction referred to earlier.

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.

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. This is because such idolatrous and godlessly focused relationships have a principle of *frustration* built into them. They promise much but, in reality, deliver much less—so often manifesting that hostility which is directed *primarily* towards God, and *expressed* towards those people, situations and things that have not fulfilled our expectations.

Fallen-human relationships are usually *contractual*. That is, they have various agendas and conditions attached to them: for example, that the relationship might remain a 'happily loving' one. In this, as we've been saying, there is much 'giving in order to *gain*'—the giving is actually 'investing' for a return. Future studies will show why such contractual approaches 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 PRIMARILY FOUND 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 gain from around about us what has been refused from above.

The diagram also shows the intrusion of *another* 'vertical' object of worship: 'false promise of life'. This may include anything that holds the prospect of 'sensory stimulation', 'magnificent things' or 'personal status'. It may, of course, include trust in and devotion to a particular deity (god), or a spiritual belief system, or any kind of philosophy. In particular—as our next study will show—it is the means by which we seek to gain some hope of dealing with our conscience, enhancing our sense of personal identity, warding off feelings of vulnerability within the circumstances of life and, in some way, dealing with the fear our inevitable death. Such false promise of life very powerfully influences the way we relate to other people, the situations we face and the things around us.⁴

Above the line our delight is never *directly* in the creation but in *the Father* on account of it. Life is *primarily found* vertically in fellowship with Him and then *expressed* horizontally in regard to people, situations and things. 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, in reality, sought on the horizontal. All the energy of the human spirit is directed primarily towards the creation rather than the Creator. In the light of our high and holy calling, how awful this is!

⁴ In future studies we will hear much about 'the promise of life in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 1:1)

the horrible matter of idolatry

Idolatry has intruded into every aspect of human history since the Fall. As has already been indicated, human beings do not 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 created.

Romans 1:25a

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 32:8b

—*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 14:3b

[They] have set up idols in their hearts.

Ezekiel 20:16b

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. And as will be seen in our next section, every culture has at its core some ‘promise of life’, which requires a ‘legal framework’ to secure its benefits. But the laws of every idol—that demand our obedience—are always, in essence, against the way of our Maker (regardless of how religious—even ‘christian’—their tone may be), 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 as we’ve been seeing, when in rebellion against our Maker the love expressed in such relationships *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 may be 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 2:20–21b

—*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 30:15a

—*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—with its lifeless outcomes.

1 Corinthians 1:11b

—*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 a *wrong* relationship to people, situations and things. This is totally the opposite of what is *right*—the way of righteousness with its authentic, human freedom and fullness.

no cause for cynicism

Although we have now seen the unauthentic nature of fallen-human love, this by no means opens up the way for a cynical—or ungraciously sceptical—attitude towards those who live in rejection of fellowship with their Maker.

It is certainly fitting to be deeply 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, *wickedly idolatrous*, and—in the sense we have been speaking of—*self-serving*. But in it all every person is, nevertheless, operating out of a powerful inner thrust for some kind of *relational wholeness*. And 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.

Enormously significant actions of fallen-human love are to be seen in almost every realm of human endeavour. There is the deep affection of parents for their children and their tireless commitment towards them. As well, there are the sincerely benevolent efforts of many who devotedly serve their communities and society in all kinds of ways.

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 so magnificently created creatures! Such things may be present even in the midst of what is otherwise, perverse. It must be

recognised that within the most degraded human situations, there is always some element of created human grandeur seeking to manifest itself—things able to be seen, if our eyes are not clouded by a reactively, self-righteous sense of personal superiority. It is very needful to speak of the reality and the great evil 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 and genuinely thankful for in each one.

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

- non-truth

(in our thinking a view of God, humanity and the creation which best promises to fulfil our God-refusing 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, it is indeed now a daily reality that OUR THINKING IS SHAPED BY WHAT OUR IDOLATROUS PASSIONS DEMAND!!!

Wrong desire, then, not only produces wrong relationship to people, situations and things, but here we see that it also produces wrong thinking.

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 pursuing its own. However, as intimated above, what is often brilliantly conceived—and very true—is not the truth.

We spoke earlier of Romans 1:18, where we are told of how in our aversion to the truth we 'grasp hold of it' in an unrighteous way (with a view to fulfilling our own passions) and in the process 'suppress it'. In this we find ourselves with a collection of 'truths' that we incorporate into our view of life—providing a mental framework for our assessment of what is right or wrong, beneficial or detrimental, meaningful or meaningless, etc. This is often called 'a world view'.

In Study 2 we saw that it was God's creational purpose that in every moment of every day our mind should reflect the truth of who *He* is as Father, Creator and King; that it should reflect the truth of who *we* are as His children, creatures and servants (worshippers, rulers, stewards); and that it should reflect the truth of what the *creation*

is as the setting for our relationship with Him: its origin, nature, purpose and goal. Thus we can have:

- # *a true view of God* (a right theology)
- # *a true view of humankind* (a right anthropology)
- # *a true view of the creation* (a right cosmology)

But, of course, through the Fall this divine intention in regard to our thinking is tragically unfulfilled.

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, in one way or another. 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 constructed religions of the world fall far short of proclaiming the true glory and wonder of His nature and Being.

Again, all who reject the revelation of God's truth, by exercising their mind apart from fellowship with Him, form **a false view of humanity**—a wrong *anthropology*. And 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, 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* and what we have been *created* and *called to be*.

In our rebellion we are, really, not interested in what *God* has created and called us to be and do, but only in what we are making *ourselves* to be and what we, *ourselves*, are determined to do.

And all who reject the revelation of God's truth, exercising their mind apart from fellowship with Him, also 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.

Driven by a polluted, inner spring of idolatrous passion, we constantly choose to see God, humanity and the creation in self-interested ways, rather than according to the truth.

The Scriptures bring strong witness to this tragic ignorance that our fallen-human thinking brings.

Ecclesiastes 7:23b

—*an open-hearted assessment of attempted 'self-wisdom'*

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

Daniel 12:4b, 10b

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

Those who 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, just the same, 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 an innate hostility

towards the Creator—and shaped by the demands of godless and idolatrous passion—can never arrive at the life-giving wisdom we were created to live in.

Romans 1:21b–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—in being sure we know better than Him—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 4:22a

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

Isaiah 44:9b, 18b–20a

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 14:14b–d

[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 23:36b–d

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, use ‘God-talk’—even 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 Western society have, in fact, been derived from the Bible. These are things that often would not be present apart from biblical revelation—and are very often absent from societies not acquainted with it.⁵

⁵ 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 (Romans 1:20).

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 15:26a

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 burning displeasure to God, they also experience the impact of their foolishness within themselves.

Isaiah 2:6b

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 for 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.

fallen-human thinking and law

Very much related to how our 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 has shown, 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 such a list of laws. 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 and 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’ values are—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 these core values. Such laws are built around three foundational areas of human living which, as 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 ‘primary core value’ of any group of people is their *cultus*: 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, identity, circumstantial security, human fullness and, usually, some kind of eternal hope). As we’ve seen, apart from God’s grace and fellowship with Him, this *cultus* is always *idolatrous* by nature. 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 and 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 later. But it is most relevant here as we discuss the subject of fallen-human thinking.

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 corrupt. 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—tends to do two things: it makes the conscience sensitive where it need *not* be, and insensitive where it should *rightly* be disturbed.⁶

Now we are about to see that with *wrong desire* producing a *wrong relationship* to people, situations and things and *wrong thinking*, there is also a tragic outcome in regard to our *daily, relational living*.

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

- foolishness and futility

(in our daily, relational living much nobility, but *corruption* in all we desire, think, say and do—nothing of eternal worth)

In Study 2 we saw that God has wonderfully planned that we should have a major part with Him in His action of *working out in history what He has purposed from eternity*:

⁶ 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 an *un-conscious* or *sub-conscious* level.

that it has been given to the children of God to joyously invest their noble humanity in the Father's wise and loving purposes!

We saw also that to reflect the purposes of God in our daily, relational living is, actually, nothing more and nothing less than to be engaged with Him in His actions of love in His world.

The tragedy is that now the enormous blessing of constantly reflecting His purposes of wisdom and love, has given way to an investment of our lives that is mere *foolishness* and *futility*. Foolish, because we've claimed to be wise in our exchanging the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:21–22, 25), leaving us bereft of *divine wisdom*; and futile, because in becoming a relationally idolatrous humanity we are left bereft of a participation in *divine love*.

We saw earlier that to be given to *idolatrous passion*—for the stimulation of sensory experience, the possession of magnificent things and the elevation of our personal status—together with an incessant engagement in *fallen-human love's grasping* for what is not being received from above, our hearts are actually more corrupt than we realize. There is, in fact, even with all that is so noble within our actions, an innately pervasive *corruption* within all that we desire, think, say and do—rendering the result our enormously expended energies to be WITHOUT ANYTHING OF ETERNAL WORTH!!!

Futility is the expenditure of useless, senseless and wasted effort. It is to have, finally, done all in vain and for nothing. It is the investment of rich, physical, mental and emotional human energies, but to no ultimately meaningful end: in essence, a life lived apart from relational intimacy and vocational partnership with our Maker. There is no greater expression of human foolishness than this!

To be given daily to *idolatrous, relational action* is to be one who never participates in the good and wise love-purposes of God. 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 44:9a

The things they treasure are worthless.

Ecclesiastes 2:11a

When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, [a mere breath], 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 give my body over to hardship that I may boast, but have not [divine] love, I gain nothing.

Matthew 5:46a

—*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 while 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 hold, 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 16:26a

—*Jesus warning us about 'getting' the lot, yet 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 human-centred life. But in the end, it *all* will have been completely futile. Surely no person created 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, indeed, to be those who enjoy the blessedness of both *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with Him, for His pleasure, glory and praise.

How tragic, then, 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 and idolatrous 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, of course, 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 willingly participated in, 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 and 3 the *magnitude* of both 'the calling' we have received and 'the fall' that marks our humanity, also may bring a strong inner reaction—being too painful to face.

It may be felt that the nature of the *call* is too *demanding* and the nature of 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 is yet to be proclaimed. And that would be such a tragic outcome!

the next study

In Study 4 we will look further into the *dilemma* that our human 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 to unfold in Study 5!

© Colin Jones
[revised 18-3-22]