

Discipleship in Depth- Man

Introduction: This lesson is about man and what is wrong with him, sin. This is something that you and I know very well, even if we don't know all the details. After all, we have been human all of our lives! But it would help us to take a deeper look and perhaps learn more about what we were, what we became, and set the stage at least for what we are now in Christ!

Let's begin by looking at the past. Humanity had learned much during the age of the classical Greeks and Romans. Roman Empire controlled much of the known world, especially the area around the Mediterranean Sea. But the Roman Empire split into two portions: the Western Empire, headquartered in Rome; and the Eastern Empire, often called the Byzantine Empire, headquartered in Constantinople or Byzantium. Divided the Roman Empire fell piecemeal. The Western Empire collapsed under the weight of successive invasions by barbarian hordes coming down out of Germany and central Europe. Out of the ashes of the Western Empire rose a smaller kingdom that called itself the Holy Roman Empire but was simply a ghost of its former greatness. The Roman Catholic Church was the glue that held it all together, but darkness descended as literacy disappeared and learning was forgotten. This is the time we refer to as "the dark ages."

The Eastern Roman empire lasted much longer not finally collapsing until just prior to the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus. But the Eastern Empire was never as great and had far less influence than its western counterpart. It was always under pressure from the growing threat of Islam, a monotheistic religion that arose in the deserts of Arabia a little over five hundred years into the Christian era. Much of the later history of the Eastern Empire centers around its consistent and constant battle with the ever-encroaching armies of Islam. The brand of Christianity practiced in the Eastern Empire, known as Eastern Orthodox Christianity, was essentially mystical and anti-doctrinal.

We can be thankful for the Eastern Orthodox Church for preserving the New Testament in Greek which still is in use in the church. The Roman Catholic Church clung to the Bible in Latin, which had been the language of the

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Empire. But with the fall of the Empire, Latin had pretty much become a dead language and the people became more and more illiterate and excluded from understanding the Scriptures. On the other hand, the Byzantine Empire retained the Greek language and proved to be far more literate and learned than its western counterpart. We find copies of the Greek Scriptures in use throughout the entirety of the dark ages.

In its dying spasms, the Western Empire and its successor, the Holy Roman Empire, tried its best to respond to the pleas of the Eastern Empire for defense against the invading Islamic forces. A series of military engagements known as the Crusades saw great numbers of men of wealth and influence traveling to the Middle East to liberate Jerusalem and other holy sites. While they were there, they purchased silk goods from China and brought back exotic spices from India and other places in the Far East. As a result, the folks back home began craving the spices to enrich their bland diets and the silks and other goods to bring comfort and joy to their barbaric and cruel lives. This, of course, led to the rise of the middle class of merchants, shippers, and manufacturers of finished goods. In turn, this caused the merchants and shippers to look for ways to import the precious goods in greater quality and quantity in less time. This led to the frantic search for a shorter route to the precious spices and inadvertently began the age of exploration.

With greater affluence came leisure time and the desire to learn to read once again. This also allowed for the importation of precious classical Greek manuscripts into the Western world. And with the rise in literacy and the rediscovery of the history of classical Greek and Roman manuscripts came a period of time known as the Renaissance, or rebirth. People were no longer content with having priests and bishops tell them what to believe—they wanted to see what the Scriptures said for themselves. This, of course, led to the Reformation where the great truth of justification by faith through the grace of God in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ became known again. And with the invention of the printing press at about the same time, the gospel of Jesus Christ once again began to be preached throughout the world.

There were many who recoiled with anger that the truth of the gospel had been suppressed by a system which kept the people in the bonds of

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ignorance and superstition for many years. If many of the things that the Church had told them were untrue, they naturally wondered what else might be untrue. Out of the Renaissance and the Reformation was born the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment. This was a time when the Western world “woke up” to the startling realization of the potential of mankind. Man rediscovered that he had a brain and that he could use it. This time period was known for its incredible advances in:

- Technology
- Science
- Medicine
- the arts
- and history

People began to think that if they were just given the opportunity they could do anything. It was during this time the philosopher Immanuel Kant announced: “mankind’s final coming of age, the emancipation of the human consciousness from the immature state of ignorance and error.” This began the rise of humanism which longed for the emancipation of the dignity of man from the authoritarian structures of religious institutionalism, tradition, archaic morality, and even the Bible. The philosophers of the Enlightenment boldly declared that they no longer needed God. Man was now captain of his fate and master of his soul. In the words of Chuck Swindoll, we thought we “were something on a stick.”

Sadly all did not go as the Enlightenment philosophers hoped. The advances in technology and science continued and even accelerated. But death, poverty, hunger, holocaust, disease, ignorance, exploitation, and war continued unabated. Even with the so-called “emancipation” of humanity from the shackles of ignorance, the human race discovered that its greatest problem still existed: sin.

- Science, the supposed savior, of humanity actually turned out to threaten its doom as we discovered the ability to unlock the atom and destroy the world.

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- Our discovery of the vastness of the universe only served to demonstrate that man without God is an insignificant pygmy in a vast ocean of cruel and thoughtless emptiness.
- The theory of evolution suggested that man was evolving into a higher life form which was supposedly far superior to its previous life form. However, pride, selfishness, hatred, rape, and murder make it hard to promote the idea that man is getting better.

But of course, all this led to another problem, without God in the picture who exactly defines what better is?

- What is good for that matter?
- Who sets the definitions of morality?
- Who has the authority to define what it means to be “enlightened” or “evolved?”

In the end, what man “discovered” was the dignity and the sinfulness of humanity.

Dignity

Let’s begin with a very basic fact: man, as God created him, is very good. You were meant to be very good. This idea is not just something from the Enlightenment philosophers. It comes directly from the Bible. The first book of the Bible is Genesis. Genesis means “beginnings” or “starting.” Of the book of Genesis covers thousands of years of world history, its first few chapters are about the creation of all things, with a special emphasis on man. Having created the earth, stars, sun, moon, sky, sea, and all the animals in just twenty-five short verses, there is a very dramatic pause in the narrative as something quite extraordinary takes place. “God said” is the dramatic introduction to the creation of man. The creation of everything else had been going at breakneck speed. But what is about to take place is so different in so many ways. While everything God created is miraculous and special, the creation of man demanded a different sort of attention. Let’s look at the record itself:

*“26 And God said, Let us make man **in our image**, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,*

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*and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in **his own image, in the image of God** created he him; male and female created he them.” Genesis 1:26–27*

Human beings are like nothing else among God’s created intelligences. Man alone is said to be created in the “image of God.” Please note how I’ve bolded the scriptural reference with the threefold repetition that humanity was created in the image of God. This dignity extends to both male and female equally.

- Out of all the details God could have given about the “hows” of creation (the questions we all ask first)
- He gives us the “what” of creation - human beings alone are the image bearers of the eternal God!
- This means that you and I are like God! Is this not amazing? In the Psalms David wonders the same thing:

*“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? 5 For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.”
Psalm 8:4–5*

Exactly what does it mean to be created in the image of God? How are we like God? Theologians (people who deeply study the Bible) are not exactly sure but at least have suggested the following components:

- Volition (will or self-determination)
- Responsibility
- Morality
- Spirituality
- Dominionality
- Rationality

It is not that the animal kingdom does not have at least some of these characteristics to a certain degree. But humanity is very special possessing each of these characteristics to the greatest degree.

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Now the point we wish to make here is that any study of humanity must include a central focus on humanity's dignity as image bearers of God.

- God wants you to know that you are a central part of the creation of this universe.
- As the author points out: "everything else, all the stars and galaxies, all the mysterious life teeming in the oceans, all the beauty of the plants, trees and mountains, and all the wonders of the world are backup music to the creation of the woman and the man."
- I would point out as well that we are special and that we alone of all God's creatures were favored with the incarnation of the Son of God, who came to die on the cross for our sins! In a very real sense, Christ came in our image! And that makes us very special.
- The bottom line is: we, human beings, bear a special and unique dignity.

Fall

It would be great if the story ended here. But it is obvious to anyone who looks around the world, searches the Internet, or looks within his own heart is something terrible has happened. We would like to look away but we are drawn to it as surely as we are drawn to look in an accident on the interstate. The human race has become wrecked and ruined! Sin entered the picture.

God created His masterpiece, and place them in the garden (more like an orchard) He called Eden. He crowned man's dignity with responsibility:

- He made man as it were his vice regent here upon the earth
- giving us full dominion and the right to rule over everything that God had created
- but also God gave man one restriction and a warning:

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Genesis 2:16-17

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- the purpose of God's command was to allow him to freely choose whether to obey or not
- God did not want to force his love and acceptance upon men
- God gave man an opportunity to rebel and the possibility of remaining faithful
 - Sure enough man rebelled
 - He disobeyed God's command
 - And he fell into sin
 - Here is the sad report:

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. 7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.” Genesis 3:1–7

- We cannot overstate the importance of what happened in this account
- It is incredibly significant
- It alters the progress of all of creation
- We call this event **The Fall**
 - It has affected every single human being born since it occurred
 - So that the dignity of man is still present
 - But it has become infected with sin

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- and a proper understanding of sin will help us understand humanity

Sin

Our modern world would like to deny its existence, but it would be impossible to go on the Internet for just one hour without seeing a multitude of examples of the little word “sin.” And as a Christian believer and disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have to gain a deep understanding of the reality of sin. The Bible clearly says that every human being has committed sin:

*“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”
Romans 3:23*

Here are some facts concerning sin:

- The “all” in Romans 3:23 includes you
- Sin has many meanings:
 - One meaning is to “miss the mark”
 - Another is to “cross the boundary”
 - Still another is “to be twisted” or “contorted”
 - Yet another is to “fall short”
- At its heart sin is rebellion and disobedience
 - We see this type of rebellion and disobedience on a national level when countries like our own rebel against her mother country
 - It happens frequently in the so-called banana republics
 - We would refer to such a thing as a coup d’état
 - In the case of humanity, however, the authority we seek to overthrow is God himself
 - At our heart, we are attempting to overthrow the program and plan of God and replace it with our own
- Sin is always falling short of God’s perfection
 - God is perfect in every way
 - When we fail to live up to his perfection by disobedience
 - We set ourselves up as kings
 - And raise the flag of rebellion against God
 - It is not as though we’re trying to reach something that we are not tall enough to reach

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- It is that we willfully turn our backs on God's plan
- This is what happened to Adam and Eve when they decided their judgment was superior to God's and ate of the forbidden fruit

Imputed Sin

Here is something to consider: when Adam and Eve sinned God could have done one of two things:

- He could've left man rebellious fate
 - by destroying man immediately and starting over again
 - or by allowing man to continue a miserable godless existence
 - man would have been hopeless
 - and God would still be righteous
- or He could have chosen to fix the problem
 - Due to His great love God chose to fix the problem
 - God chose to redeem man
 - But this redemption is a serious undertaking
 - God would have to take drastic steps in order to fix what is broken
 - He could not simply forgive sin for that would violate His righteousness
 - So He had to find a way to provide forgiveness of sin
 - And maintain His righteous government of the earth and the universe
 - God immediately initiated His plan to redeem the world by the sacrifice of His Son:

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15

- Man may have rebelled but God loved!

Adam's sin has consequences that we are feeling today. His entire race, the human race, was plunged into sin and condemnation.

- This is often referred to as “Imputed Sin”

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- “Imputed” is an accounting term which means “to put to the account of”
 - this is appropriate because we are all born with a sin debt
 - this is a debt which is created in the Eden as a result of the actions of our first parents



○ an analogy we might use to explain this is the current national debt and the individual taxpayer figures (for the current figures go to

<http://www.usdebtclock.org/>

- At the moment of this capture, the US National debt was \$19,969,432,178,268.00...nearly 20 Trillion dollars. If the debt was equally distributed among the citizens of the country (who technically own the debt) each of us would owe \$61,345.00 but since there are far more citizens than taxpayers who can actually pay the debt we actually owe \$165,883.00 each. This is a debt most of us did not make, but we all must pay one way or another.
- In the same way, every person on the earth owes a sin debt that they cannot pay. Only someone infinitely righteous with an infinite life pay the vast sin debt the human race has imputed to its account. Of course, that person is the Lord Jesus Christ!
- Paul makes this clear when he says:

*“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”
Romans 5:18–19*

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- The one sin led to the condemnation (debt/imputation) for all men with the sin of Adam.
 - You and I are born into a condemned human race.
- The doctrine of imputed Sin is shared to like by Protestants and Catholics but is rejected by the Eastern Orthodox. However, all traditions agree about “inherited” sin.

Inherited Sin

The one clearly Christian doctrine that can be empirically proved (by evidence of our own eyes) is the doctrine of our sinful nature. It is not hard to recognize a rebel. The human race is totally prone to:

- Selfishness
- Laziness
- Hate
- Deception
- Anger
- and sexual perversion.

As the author points out, the only need to take a look at our lives for about ten seconds if we are honest and see that we are sinners. Just as you inherit certain traits from your parents:

- eye color
- height
- weight
- skin color

You also inherit a tendency to rebel against God.

- The best way to think of inherited sin is to see it as a spiritual infection or a cancer.
- Because both of my parents died with cancer, and at least one of my grandparents, a good doctor would keep a constant check to make sure that I did not inherit the tendency toward cancer.
- This spiritual infection or spiritual cancer spreads to all mankind.
 - We are born with a sinful inclination or disposition

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- Just as we were born hungry for food we are also born hungry to rebel.
 - We are born rebels
 - We cannot help but sin
 - It is in our nature

As David points out in Psalm 51:5

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

Paul says we are rebels by nature in Ephesians 2:3

“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

In Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, says we are hopeless in our condition:

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”
Jeremiah 13:23

Just as we cannot change our genetics, the fall of mankind has infected us in such a way that we can change our disposition toward sin.

- But use the accounting term imputed for a moment:
 - Not only were you born with a massive debt in your bank account -one so large you can never pay it off
 - But you are also born with a huge spending habit (much like our national debt)
 - You are in debt
 - And by your actions you are making the debt larger and larger so that you could never ever hope to pay it off
- Please remember man was created good
 - God creates nothing but good

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- and we are in God's image and we are still in God's even though we are fallen

"Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God."

James 3:9

- But this image has been tainted
 - Infected
 - and marred by sin
- As a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, you must come to a firm conviction about your dignity and depravity
 - your dignity is the result of God's creative genius
 - your depravity is a result of your own sin
- While we may be able to do good things for people from a human standpoint, for example:
 - love our children
 - help the poor
 - stay off drugs
- From the standpoint of our relationship with God, we are born rebels.
 - Outside of God's love
 - and mercy
 - there is no one who is good!
 - And certainly, none righteous
- As a Christian, you must have a high view of humanity with respect to God's creation
- But equally important, you must have a low view of humanity with respect to our standing before a perfect God.
- In Romans 3:10-20 mankind is given a spiritual MRI that shows us exactly what we are:

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not

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one. 13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: 14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood: 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways: 17 And the way of peace have they not known: 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes. 19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Romans 3:10–20

Do you get it? We clearly see both dignity and depravity. Here there is no evolution but in fact devolution.

- We need to see our hopeless condition.
- We need to recognize that without God’s grace through Jesus Christ we are helpless, hopeless, and without purpose or value
- Real disciples need to recognize how sinful they really are in order to exalt God’s mercy
- Without God’s mercy, we would be totally lost forever!

Questions to ponder:

1. Why do you think God created man?
2. How should the reality that man, believer and unbeliever alike, carries the image of God affect the way we treat one another?
3. Why do you think Adam sinned?
4. Man has an inclination toward sin from birth. Describe the ways we see this in children.
5. If man is truly dead with no ability to come to God on our own, how are we then able to come to him?
6. What are some of the sins that you personally struggle with?