

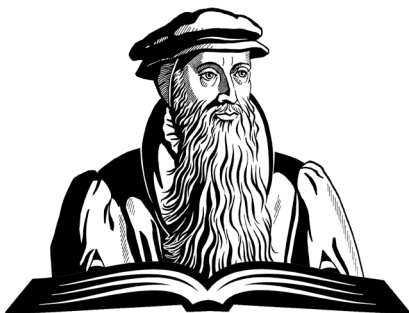
# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

### *Module 3*

## ANTHROPOLOGY— THE DOCTRINE OF MAN



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

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# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 1*

### **Introduction**

We're given an historic account, taken from the Highlands of Scotland. This is the northern section of the nation of Scotland. There was a godly Presbyterian minister there, and he had hired a Highland maid to serve in the kitchen of the manse, where the minister lived with his family. And they assembled for worship on that first day when the kitchen maid had come to work for them, and in family worship, he asked her the question, "How many commandments are there?" And she was unable to give him a clear answer. And upon further investigation, he discovered that she knew very little about the truth of God's Word. And so he sought to explain that to her. And in his parting counsel, he encouraged her to pray every day these words: "Oh Lord, show me myself." Show me myself. Well it happened, in God's providence, that things took place that caused her to have to leave the manse, and so he lost touch with her. And a period of time, months, had passed, and when he was visiting in his parish, he came to a home where there was a sick boy. And he discovered, upon visiting that home, that his sister was this Highlands kitchen maid that had previously worked for him. And she came to him, and said to the minister, "Oh, minister, I have been desperate in my condition! Ever since I was with you, I have been praying every day, Oh, Lord, show me myself." And she was under an overwhelming sense of a conviction of sin, of her lostness, and her need for a Savior. And the minister said to her, "Well, then, dear lass, I would encourage you now to begin praying every day, Oh, Lord, show my thyself." Oh Lord, show me thyself. And took that counsel and went about praying that. And we're told that, after a space of time, that she was actually brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, that she came to know the Lord, and to be a true believer. And you notice in that brief account, that she came to both a true knowledge of herself, and a true knowledge of God. And as we'll see, these two things are connected in the Scriptures.

This series of seven modules, or courses, takes us through an introductory study of Systematic Theology. In the opening lectures of the first module, we provided an overview of the scope and purpose of these seven courses. The first module covered First Principles—we had ten lectures on the Doctrine of Scripture. And the second module covered twelve lectures on the Doctrine of God. Those first two modules provide the basic principles or axioms for all that follows in our study of Systematic Theology. Everything else is built upon them and flows from them. God, as the principle Being, is the foundation of all knowledge, and we started by first treating Scripture, because we know the Doctrine of God in Systematic Theology comes from His self-revelation in Scripture, through Christ, by the Spirit. The scope of this third module is to explore what the Bible teaches about man. And what we learn from Scripture about God leads us to a right understanding of man.

Well, men are tireless in their pursuit of understanding themselves. Their origin, their make-

up, their identity, their purpose, and destiny, and so on. But true knowledge of man is not found within himself. It is discovered in what God reveals in Scripture. So if you wish to gain a deeper understanding of man, these lectures aim to benefit you. The lectures in this third module, on the Doctrine of Man, are introductory, not exhaustive, and they are intended to furnish you with a foundation that you can build upon in your further studies. As you'll recall, from the first module, theology, broadly defined, has to do with the study of the knowledge of God, and all that He has revealed for us to believe and do. We noted that it is the doctrine of living unto God through Christ, thus addressing both our thinking and our living. The Doctrine of Man, therefore, is an indispensable component to Systematic Theology. We will learn, for example, about man's nature. Man, made as the image of God, his freedom of will, original sin, man's total depravity, as well as God's relating to man by way of covenant. But in this first lecture, we'll consider a general introduction to the doctrine. And so, as with all of our other lectures, we'll be following the same pattern, and we'll begin by considering a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the Doctrine of Man.

We read in Psalm 8, verses 4 to 6: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." Well, what do we learn from these few verses? Well, first of all, these questions about man arise out of the consideration of God and His works. Notice that the Psalm opens and closes with the same words. It says, "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" David raises his thoughts to contemplate the glory of God. Verse 1 continues: "who hast set thy glory above the heavens." There is an order here. He begins with God, and then considers man. Because in order to truly understand man, we must first have a knowledge of God.

Secondly, having thought about who God is, he then considers what God does—His works. In verse 3, we read: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained." David is reflecting on the wonder of God in His work of creation. His eyes are lifted upward to consider the vast expanse of the heavens, with their innumerable stars—stars he cannot number, and a universe so massive that he cannot comprehend it. And all of this constitutes merely the work of God's fingers, as it were, which He has ordained.

Thirdly, with these elevated thoughts of God and His work of creation, David then asks the question, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" In light of the transcendent glory of God, and in light of the vastness of God's created universe, David stands amazed at how small and insignificant man seems by way of contrast. In a parallel passage, Psalm 144, verses 3 and 4, we read: "LORD, what is man that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away."

Fourthly, it is not just that God takes notice of man. David says, in verse 4: "and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" God stoops to meet with man, to enter into relationship with man, to draw near to man, and this is a wonder of wonders. The eternal Creator, who is above the highest heavens, condescends to bring finite creatures into relationship with Himself. David is humbled and amazed at these realities.

Fifthly, having confessed his lowliness and unworthiness, David turns to speak about the dignity and place of privilege that God confers on man. In verse 5, he says: "For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." God has raised man, as a lowly creature, to a position of glory and honor. God created man as the image of God, which

we'll be considering in detail, in a future lecture. Man is lower than the angels, in terms of created power, but he is crowned with glory and honor that, in other ways, excels the angels.

Lastly, David speaks of the role and responsibility that God gave to man in the earth. Verse 6 continues, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." Well, as you recognize, this harkens back to the Garden of Eden, and the commission given to man, in Genesis 1, verses 26 and 28. The Lord has given to man stewardship, and authority, and rule under God, and over the livestock, the beasts, the fowl, and the fish—the rest of the created order. This service of God is also a place of privilege that belongs to man. So when we sing Psalm 8, we are faced with both body man's humility and man's dignity. And a Biblical understanding of the Doctrine of Man leads us to see, believe, and embrace both of these realities—man's humility, and man's dignity.

Well, secondly, we'll consider a doctrinal exposition of this introductory material. John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer, opened his most famous work, which is called, or entitled, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He opened with these words: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." So these two, the knowledge of God and ourselves, are intertwined. On the one hand, as Calvin writes, "The knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find Him." Seeing ourselves drives us to God. But on the other hand, without the knowledge of God, there is no true knowledge of self. Again, Calvin says, "It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself, unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating Him, to scrutinizing himself." Well, this is precisely what we saw earlier in Psalm 8.

Secondly, nothing, therefore, is more important than coming to know God in Christ, and to see His glory. So, all that we learned in the second module, on the Doctrine of God, is essential to a right consideration of what we learn about the Doctrine of Man. Man's fallen, sinful inclination is to take glory to himself, to exalt himself in pride. Jeremiah 9, verses 23 and 24, says: "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me." Well, Paul picks up this same theme and says, "That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." You'll find that both in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 31, and 2 Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 17.

Thirdly, the salvation of sinful men is not found within themselves, nor confined to a knowledge of themselves. Natural and false religion says, "Know thyself, save thyself," whereas, Christ said, in John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." A true knowledge of ourselves is indispensable, but not as an end in itself. Seeing our sinful selves, our lostness, must lead us to a saving knowledge of God in Christ.

Fourthly, in Genesis 1 and 2, we learn that man was made in the image of God, for communion with God. He enjoyed that place of privilege, of living in God's favorable presence, endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; but sin brought disruption to that nearness to God, and a distortion of man's true knowledge of God, and of himself. Fallen man is blind to the light, ignorant of the truth, and spiritually dead to the things of God. First Corinthians 2, verse 14, says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The problem is that man is self-deceived. And by definition, self-deception means that they are unaware of their condition. All of man's hubris and boasting about his knowledge and about modern progress are foolishness, due

to his ignorance of his true condition, and of who God is. First Corinthians 3, verse 18, says, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.”

Fifthly, the light of the gospel shines into man’s innate darkness, bringing the blinding brightness of the reality about man’s perilous condition. It declares the glory of God, as Creator, Judge, Sovereign, and the all-powerful Deliverer, who is able to save sinners to the uttermost. In revealing God, it also shows man himself—his depravity, his deadness, and his desperate dependence upon Christ’s saving mercies. Isaiah experienced this—you’ll read about it in Isaiah 6. He has this vision, and he sees the glory of the Lord, and His train filling the temple. And that sight of God leads him to say, “Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.” He goes on to say, “for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Knowledge of God showed him who he was, and it was necessary for an angel to take a coal from the altar of sacrifice—that picture of atonement, prefiguring Christ’s atoning work, and to place that coal upon his lips, in order that he might be cleansed.

Sixthly, and lastly, man’s primary purpose of existence is not found within himself. The Westminster Shorter Catechism opens, in its first question and answer, by saying that “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.” His chief end, his primary purpose. So you cannot understand man, detached from God. Man’s origin, and identity, and meaning, and purpose, and destiny are all connected to God—understanding who God is, as the Creator, the Governor, the Judge, and the Redeemer of His elect people.

Well, thirdly, we should consider this introductory material polemically. First of all, we have to recognize that knowledge of man is not found within himself, so the notion that many people have is that we don’t need the Bible, and we don’t need things from God, that we can, left to ourselves, figure out ourselves through the study of ourselves. But that would be leaving man to the darkness that is within himself. He would be groping about in the dark, unable to see or understand anything about himself. We learn that to see clearly, we must see objectively. We have to see from outside ourselves. You know, when we’re studying something, even in the created world, we’re looking from the outside upon the habitat of a creature, their eating habits, where they live, what they do, how they communicate, and so on, and so forth. Well, we’re able to see objectively by seeing ourselves through the lens of Scripture, through God’s revelation outside of us, and what He tells us about ourselves. So, to see clearly, we must see objectively.

But also, to see truly, we must see what God sees, and what God says. And so, we need to be brought under the light of the knowledge of God, in order to see, What does God say about us? How does He describe us? Because He is truth itself, and therefore, and therefore, we must receive the truth from Him. Too often men have a too high a view of themselves. Natural man is always seeking to dethrone God, seeking to put man in the place of God. And so people will speak about being the master of their own destiny, and so on. Well, this is, quite frankly, foolishness—it’s silliness. It’s absolutely ridiculous to think that man is somehow able to occupy the place of controlling everything in himself and around himself in this world, and has, within the scope of his very limited understanding, a knowledge of things. No, we must humble ourselves, submit ourselves to the Lord, and receive from Him His own gracious Word. Let God be God in all things.

We also have to confront the limits of science. In our day, there is a great misnomer, that science is the be-all and end-all of knowledge. And so people think that you can apply the scientific method to all areas of knowledge, including knowing man. And, on one hand, there’s some usefulness, because when it comes to understanding man’s body, science has much to contribute. We’re looking

at man biologically, we're using empirical data, observation, experimentation to learn about bones, and joints, and sinews, to learn about cells, and the chemical makeup of the body, blood, and how all of the different pieces and functions fit together—that's helpful. But science is limited to that. Science can tell us nothing about man's soul. And so science is limited in its ability to inform us about the whole man. Nor can science tell us about man's origin, or man's purpose, or man's true identity, or man's destiny. And so we need to confront this misguided idea of thinking of science as the source of knowledge—the sole source of knowledge in understanding man. It has something to contribute, but it's very limited in what it contributes to our understanding of the nature of man. To understand the whole man, we are dependent upon the revelation that God gives us in His Word.

Lastly, we need to confront every inclination to detach the knowledge of man from the knowledge of God. So any pursuit of knowing man, understanding man, his various components, that is, in any way, not connected to the knowledge of God, will lead to a dead end. It will be futile and fruitless. The knowledge of man is grounded in the knowledge of who God is—the One who created man, who has designed man, who has given man purpose, and who has condescended to interface and interact with man.

Fourthly, under this overarching outline of our lecture, we can now draw some practical applications to ourselves. First of all, we see very clearly that man was made for communion with God. Man was made for communion with God. And so anything less than that results in a complete loss. If we do not recognize that, in the beginning, God created man in order to have communion with him, if we do not understand the consequences of the fall, the loss of communion with God, and the sin and misery that comes as a consequence, we will have very little to work with, in our studies. No, we need to see that the aim is for man to walk in communion—the creature with the Creator Himself. Now, for those who have been brought into a state of grace, those who are born-again, and who have been converted, brought to faith and repentance, that shapes your whole perspective on life. That in this world, your number one priority is to seek and to preserve that communion with God, through the ordinances that He's given to us, in His Word, in prayer, and so on. And so we are to keep up this priority of drawing near to the Lord, and of seeking to walk with Him, in union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the knowledge of man leads to a need for a saving knowledge of God. And so, coming to see man—understanding the fall, original sin, man's total depravity, the implications on his will, and so on—seeing the alienation that exists between God and man, therefore seeing man truly, leads us to the priority for a saving knowledge of God Himself. To be brought to know God through the Lord Jesus Christ, as a Redeemer and as a Savior, and as the One who reconciles His own people unto the Lord, and secures for them, through His atoning sacrifice, the forgiveness of their sins.

Thirdly, we see that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, referring to the Shorter Catechism, question #1. And so, the number one priority, and the number one pursuit that we are to have in life, in this world, is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. So whether we eat or drink, we're to do it to the glory of God—so the smallest things in life. Yes, it's true that we seek the glory of God in His worship, both public and private, but we're also to seek to bring Him glory in every detail of all of our life. And that communion that we were speaking about leads the believer into the enjoyment of God as well. This is participating in what will ultimately be the believer's final destiny, because we will glorify God best and most, when taken to glory, and brought in the end to the consummation of the ages, resurrection of the body, and dwelling with God forever. There, we will, for eternity, glorify and enjoy Him, and we are to be busy about that here and now.



Fourthly, and lastly, man is to be seen as a worshiper. The Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Those are the words that Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, in John, chapter 4. Man is a worshiper. I mean, that's why, if you want to understand man, that's why you'll see, when man is without the knowledge of the triune God of the Bible, and without a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, they still worship. They'll worship sticks and stones, or golden objects. They'll worship the stars in heaven, or the earth. They'll worship themselves. But they've been made to worship. In their depravity, they seek all of these idolatrous outlets. But man has been made by God to worship the living and true God, and to do so through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our chief occupation is worship. It will be our chief occupation for eternity, and it is our privilege here, as well. Psalm 16, verse 8, says, "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Verse 11, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Man is to be seen—if he is to be seen rightly, he is to be seen as a worshiper, and called to worship the living and true God.

Well, in conclusion, in this introductory lecture, we've established from the Scriptures the importance of the Doctrine of Man, within Biblical Christianity, and for the believer's thinking, practice, and experience. In the remainder of the lectures throughout this third module on Systematic Theology, we will be delving into a more detailed consideration of what God has revealed about man. And as we do, we will be led with David, in Psalm 8, to sing, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 2*

### **The Nature of Man**

Most people own at least one mirror. You'll find them in lots of places, both in public and private. You often see them over a sink, enabling people to better comb their hair, straighten their shirt, or brush their teeth. But you also find them in many other places. Sometimes, women even carry them in their purses. Mirrors allow you to see yourself, and many people like looking at themselves. They're concerned about their appearance, and how they may be viewed by others. But mirrors have significant limitations. They can only show you one part of the body—the part facing the mirror and whatever fits within the size of that particular frame. But there is more to you than what is reflected in any mirror. You have a soul, as well as a body, and the soul cannot be seen with the eye. Truly understanding ourselves requires looking beyond what is skin deep. We need to answer questions like, Who am I? What is my origin? Where is my destiny? What is my purpose in life? How do I know things? And on and on the questions go. Many of these questions can only be supplied by the Lord, and He provides the answers in the Scriptures. Only the Creator and the Designer Himself knows truly and fully what man is.

The series of lectures in this third module, or course, on Systematic Theology is devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Man. The purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about man, before and after the fall and the entrance of sin into the world. In the previous lecture, we considered an introduction to this module. In the present lecture, we will explore the Nature of Man, and we'll begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the Nature of Man. In Genesis, chapter 2, we read some important things. In verse 7, it says, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." And then, in verse 18, it says, "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." And then, in verses 21 and following, it says, "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

In Genesis 1, God provided us with an historical account of the creation of the universe in six days. We learned that man was created on the sixth day, in chapter 1, verse 26 and following. He is the apex, if you will, of all that God made. In Genesis 2, God goes back and provides more details about the creation of man. Verse 7, which we just cited, tells us that God Himself created man as part of His handiwork. "The LORD God formed man," it says. So this eliminates any possibility of mankind evolving from earlier forms of animal life, as in the myth of evolution. God is the Creator.

We also learned of man's lowly origins. We are told that God formed the body of the first man of the dust of the ground. As a consequence of sin, and the entrance of death, this reality remains vividly before our eyes. In Genesis 3, verse 19, after the fall, we read, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." We also learned that God created mankind, male and female, from the beginning. He was made with the capacity for relationships. Verse 22 tells us that the body of the first woman was made from man: "and the rib which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman," verse 22 says. We are also told that she was made for man. So if you go back to verse 18, the Lord says, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." So designed mankind with gender distinction, and we'll explore the implications of this later in the lecture.

Furthermore, we learned that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. So God gave life to him. Man's first breath came directly from God. And he was constituted a living soul, a living being. Mankind was more than just material substance having a body; he was created with a reasonable soul as well.

From the opening pages of holy Scripture, we're introduced to the nature of mankind. His nature is rooted in the origin, design, and purposes with which God created him. Genesis 1 to 3 provides us with true history about the very first man and the very first woman. This historicity of Adam is an essential Biblical doctrine, and we must recognize and vehemently resist any departure from this truth, deeming it false and dangerous error. It remains essential for many other Biblical doctrines, and for godly practice. It is a solid foundation, on which God builds many other truths in Scripture. So undermining the foundation would topple the structure of Biblical orthodoxy.

Secondly, let's consider some of the doctrinal details related to the nature of man. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 4, paragraph 2, begins with these words: "After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts." In this lecture, we are considering the Nature of Man more generally. In the next lecture, we will focus our attention on what it means for man to be created as the image of God. So in this lecture, first of all, man is a creature, a created being—we see that—he is not a god. He exists as a result of being made by the living and true God, as we sing in Psalm 100, verse 3, "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." Or, to use Paul's words, it is "in him"—that is, God—that "we live, and move, and have our being"—Acts 17, verse 28. So man is temporal, not eternal. Human history has a beginning, unlike God, who is eternal and outside of time.

Secondly, God created mankind with physical, material bodies. And we see that matter itself is not evil, contrary to some of the heresies in the early church. At the end of the sixth day, God declared that what He had made, including man's body, was very good—chapter 1, verse 31. The body has dignity. Among many other reasons, this is important, because Christ, in His incarnation, assumed to Himself a true human body. So denying this would completely undermine the gospel altogether. Our bodies have intricately designed faculties, all of which are to be employed in God's service, for God's glory. Therefore, the believer is told, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's"—1 Corinthians 6, verse 20. Or as we read in Romans 6, verse 13, we are to devote the parts of our body "as instruments of righteousness unto God."

But man is more than just a body. So thirdly, we see that we have a living, immortal, reasonable soul. Ecclesiastes 12, verse 7 speaks of death, saying, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it

was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” So the constituted nature of man consists of both body and soul. Now there are some, in our own day, those who are Dispensationalists, have mistakenly taught that man’s nature consists of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. But a careful study of Scripture proves that God uses the words “soul” and “spirit” interchangeably, as synonymous terms for the same thing. So man is constituted chiefly of two things: body and soul. The body has various parts and members, and the soul has various faculties. Think of your mind, which is distinct from your brain, or man’s volition—his will, or his affections, and so on.

Fourthly, we should also note that man was created with the moral law of God written on his heart. Romans 2, verse 15 speaks of the Gentiles, who did not have the ten commandments in writing, but, as it says, “which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” Man is not created as a blank slate, in a state of innocent ignorance. He’s created with a sense of good and evil. Man’s conscience serves as God’s deputy within him, testifying against his sinful deeds. This is true because man has the law of God written upon his heart.

Fifthly, mankind was created male and female from the beginning, according to God’s perfect design. He made male and female both, united in dignity, and united in their faculties and privileges as bearers of God’s image, but distinguished as man and woman. Two genders, not more, and not fewer. Gender distinctions and role relationships were established before the fall, not as a consequence of sin. To deny or distort the God-given distinction between male and female is wicked, and creates sinful chaos and confusion within the created order. This is why Paul can describe the abomination of homosexuality as “against nature,” in Romans 1, verse 26. Likewise, the Bible specifies different roles for man and woman, from the beginning. Given the importance placed on this in Scripture, and the attack on it in the present day, we’ll consider this in a bit more detail. Think in terms of the roles of men and women within the church, first of all. Paul addresses a woman’s role within the church, in 1 Timothy 2, verses 11 and 12, where it says, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” We find the same thing being stated in 1 Corinthians, chapter 14, verse 34 and surrounding that passage. But going back to 1 Timothy 2, notice that he grounds this—what he’s just said—in creation. It says, “For Adam was first formed, then Eve,” in verse 13. So he is not describing something cultural, limited to one time and place. It’s rooted in God’s design, within the created order itself. Paul specifies to Timothy what must be implemented in all churches, at all times. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 3, Paul writes, “But I would have you know”—and then he goes on, and says, “the head of the woman is the man.” Then he explains the distinctions in decorum between men and women, and he grounds the mandate for women to cover their heads in public worship within the created order, along with other reasons. So he says, in verses 8 and 9, “For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.” The point here is that Paul is distinguishing the roles of men and women, even their decorum in public worship, and he’s rooting it in creation.

We can also think about the roles of men and women in the home. Paul also applies the principle of male headship we just saw in 1 Corinthians 11, to the home. In Genesis 2, we learned that God made woman as a helpmeet and companion to complete man, bound together in unity and mutual love. That beautiful relationship reflected order, assigning leadership to the man. We read in Ephesians 5, verses 22 to 24, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their

own husbands in every thing.” Again, you’ll see something similar in 1 Peter 3, verses 1 to 7. So the husband employs his headship in giving himself, in self-denying, self-sacrificing love for his wife. Headship is for the benefit of those under its leadership.

But Paul describes male headship as a matter of fact in God’s design—not just what ought to be, but what is. And he raises our eyes, even above the created order, to show how it reflects the greater relationship of Christ as Head to His bride, the church. Well, the broader Biblical doctrine regarding the roles of men and women goes beyond the scope of this lecture. But we need to see that these Biblical truths take us all the way back to God’s created design in the beginning. In summary, we learned that God created man, male and female, with a body, and a soul, and with the law of God written upon his heart.

Next, we must consider three errors that arise, related to man’s nature, beyond the ones that we’ve already covered in what we said. First of all, there are theologians that deny the historicity of Adam as the very first man. And this comes in many different forms. They will say that Adam was a person that was subsequent, there were other people besides him at the time, or were before him. Others will say that it’s just a story, and that it’s not an actual person that’s being described, and so on. Not only does this deny the plain teaching of Scripture, it also undermines other Biblical doctrines. God sets the gospel within the context of the relationship of the headship of Adam to all his posterity, on one hand, and the relationship of Christ—called the last Adam—to His elect people. First Corinthians 15, verse 22, says, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Notice the words later in that chapter, verse 45 and verse 47, “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam”—speaking of Christ—“was made a quickening spirit. . . .The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.” So for example, in a future lecture, we’ll be considering the Doctrine of Original Sin. We’ll learn that sin comes to all men in Adam, as the representative of the human race. And you can consider, for example, Romans 5, verses 12 to 21, which covers this doctrine. We read things like, “As by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men.” Or it says in that passage, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” So the historicity of Adam as the very first man is essential to Biblical religion.

Secondly, we need to assert the fact that no group within mankind is more or less human than another. All are made in the image of God. God created a variety of ethnicities and nations, with diverse features and skin tones, and so forth. But they all come from one single source—the first Adam. Malachi 2. Verse 10 says, “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother.” Paul said in Acts 17, verse 26, that God “made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.” The gospel is to be preached to every tribe and tongue upon the earth, and the diversity of people groups is reflected in heaven itself. Revelation 7, verse 9 says, “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb.” And so God created the world with great diversity and there’s many discrepancies and differences between different people groups, and those are going to be preserved, even represented, on the last day.

Thirdly, we spoke earlier about those who consider man’s physical body evil. But we should also consider those who deny the existence of the soul, asserting that man’s nature is only physical. So, if that’s true, then when man dies, he dies like a dog. Well this has many implications. It undermines human responsibility, for example. When a tree drops a branch on your car, you do not

deem the tree culpable. The tree is operating within the physical laws of nature. If man is merely physical, then whatever he does is an inescapable result of physical forces and instinct. So he does not have a mind to decide anything, or volition to choose anything? Well, this is obviously absurd. It would also eliminate human consciousness, introspection, and intentionality. Animals don't sit and think about the past, or the future, matters of logical deduction, cause and effect, things that they've never seen or don't even exist, and so on.

Furthermore, the body changes drastically over an extended period of time, but people remain the same person with the same self-awareness, and so on. So you see, just a few brief examples of why this irrational notion of the denying of the soul needs to be rejected. God reveals, in His Word, the certain truth that man's nature includes an immortal soul. And the refusal to believe this leads to absurdity.

Fourthly, and lastly, we can now draw a few practical applications for ourselves. First of all, the place of humility. Man was created in the beginning from the dust of the earth, and when he dies, he returns to dust. And so, this should induce, within our own hearts and souls, a sense of humility, as creatures before God. An inflated sense of our own hubris, and power, and so on, is unseemly, and is inappropriate in light of all that we are. That humility leads to dependence. Remember those words from Acts 17, in God we live, and move, and have our being. We need to be conscious of how dependent we are upon Him, for everything, not just for big things—when we get into a crisis and we're crying out to the Lord for help. Not just even for spiritual things, which is obvious, but for everything. We depend upon the Lord, every breath we take, our heart beating, and all of the other details that form our lives. We should walk with dependence upon the Lord.

Secondly, the bodies of believers belong to the Lord for His service. We're created by Him, and we're responsible to Him. You think about those words I mentioned from Romans 6, where the Apostle Paul is saying to the believer, Your body is not your own. You've been brought into union with the Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore, the parts of your body are actually His. They are to be employed in ways that please Him, that glorify Him. They're not to be employed in sinful things, but in things that exalt the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Well, that means we should exercise stewardship over the body, like everything else that God has given to us. You see Paul speaking of this in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 27: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." And so there's dignity that belongs to the human body.

Thirdly, the soul of man is the soul of the matter. Unlike the world, we cannot be preoccupied with the body—excessive food, and exercise, sleep, or pandering to our bodily comforts. We recognize the important place of the soul, Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." And so we should take this doctrine and use it to reinforce the priority of cultivating the soul—of the need for our souls to be sanctified, and to grow in holiness, to die unto sin, and to live unto Christ, and be conformed to His righteousness. And so, the important place of the soul within our thinking.

Fourthly, with regards to the dignity of the believer's body, you see this expressed, even in the fact that it is laid in the grave upon death. The Shorter Catechism tells us that the bodies of believers, when they are buried, are still in union with Christ, and that they are laid in the grave with the hope of the resurrection. So when Christ came to save His people, He came to save all of them. He came to save their souls; He came to save their bodies as well. When the believer is brought into union with Christ, all of them is brought into union with Christ. And therefore, there is, even in the body of a believer who has died, it is to be viewed and seen, and treated with dignity. This

is reflected in the fact that, throughout history, Biblical Christian burial is used. This is the model that the Lord gives us. When the believer dies, we don't just dispose of the body like trash, or burn it like trash, but rather, it is, with a measure of decorum, laid to rest in the grave, with the hope of the resurrection. I mean, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the incarnate Word, has a body. When He ascended into heaven, He ascended with His human body. His human body is actually exalted above the highest heavens in glory. One of the Puritans said that we have human dust on the throne of heaven, so this is important for us as well by way of implication. We recognize, of course, the immortality of the soul. Not only is the body laid to rest with dignity, but at death, the soul of believers is perfected in holiness and goes immediately into the presence of the Lord. How precious the soul is—immeasurable in its value. The Lord Jesus tells us, What will you give in exchange for your soul? Would you give the whole world in exchange for your soul? And the answer is, of course, a dogmatic, "No!" That our soul is worth more than the whole world put together, and it ought to be viewed as such. That's how God sees it, that's how we should see it as well, having our minds conformed to His own.

Well, in conclusion, in this lecture, we have explored the nature of man. This addresses questions about man's origin, his identity, his purpose, his destiny, and so on. In the next lecture, we will turn our consideration to the Biblical doctrine of man as the image of God.

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 3*

### **Man as the Image of God**

What if I were to ask you the question, What makes a rock different from a fruit tree? Well, you might think to yourself, Well, a rock is something that doesn't move—it's hard, it stays the same, whereas, a fruit tree grows. You see it come up out of the ground, it grows to maturity, it has leaves, it drops those leaves in the winter, and then eventually, after a few years, it begins to bear fruit, and so on. Well, true enough. Well then, what makes the difference between a tree and a fly—like a housefly. What makes the difference between those? And you'd say, Well, a fly is more animated. It has movement, it has more complexity. So it has eyes that can see, and patterns through which it moves, and its lifespan is obviously shorter, and so on. And that's true as well. Well then, what makes the difference between a fly and a dog. Here again, we have some similarities, in this case, they're both animated—they're active creatures. But a dog has more capabilities, doesn't it? It can do all sorts of things that a fly can't do, and it has a relationship with people, and so, you can have a pet dog and train it tricks, and so on. Well, what is the difference between a dog and a person? In other words, what exactly makes a person a person? And you can't say that they're animated, right? They both run, they both eat, they both feel pain, they can even have a capacity for companionship, and so on. Dogs even communicate—they communicate to one another, and there is some measure of communication between people and dogs. So what is it? I mean, you can train a dog to do all sorts of things, and you can train a person to do all sorts of things. What exactly makes a person a person? This is an important question. It's important, of course, in terms of society at large—how people think about the difference between animals and human beings. But it's also important for us Biblically, to understand the mind of God, and His design that He has given to the world as a whole.

Well, in this lecture, we're going to seek to get to the nub, to the core of the answer. What makes a person a person. This series of lectures in this third module on Systematic Theology is devoted, as you know, to the study of the Doctrine of Man. And so, our purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about man, both before and after the fall, and the entrance of sin into the world. And so now, in this third lecture, we are going to turn and explore what it is for man to be made in the image of God—Man as the Image of God. And so we'll begin, first of all, by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up the consideration of man as the image of God, following the same pattern we've used throughout these courses.

So I'll direct your attention to Genesis, chapter 1, verses 26 to 28, because there we read these words: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, 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. So God created man in his own image,



in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” So as you know, in Genesis 1, God provides us with the historical account of the creation of the universe during the very first week of history. And on the sixth day, God made man. He made man as the apex, as the pinnacle of His creation. And we see in this that man is truly, and inherently special—that he’s distinguished by God from all else that is in creation. And specifically, we’re told that God created man in the image, or likeness, of God. Now those two words—the word “image” and the word “likeness”—are synonymous and interchangeable. There are times, as the Scriptures continue to unfold, where this will be referred to as the image, and other times when it will be referred to as the likeness of God, and we’ll see some of that. But both the words image and likeness tell us some important things. They tell us, first of all, that man is distinct from God. So he’s not God—it’s not as if God duplicated Himself—he’s distinct from Him. But he also represents Him. A likeness of God, is a representation of God. And so we have, between God and man, this unparalleled relationship. God has entered into a unique relationship with mankind that is different from the relationship He has with everything else in creation. He remains the Creator of the world, and of the rocks that we spoke about, and the fly, and the fruit tree, and the dog, and so on, and, yes, He’s Creator of mankind as well. But none of those other things are made in His image, none of them are made in His likeness, none of them represent God in the way that man does. Nor do they have the ability to have a relationship with God in the way that man does. Now this description of man being made in the image of God is something that applies to all men—not, just Adam, but all of his posterity, all men, in all place, at all times. And it doesn’t matter what part of the world they come from, or what language they speak, or what tribe that they derive from, and so on. Likewise, it applies to both men and women. He created them, male and female, both made in the image of God, as image-bearers of God. And the last thing that we see in this section of Genesis, chapter 1, is that, as the image of God, man is given dominion. He’s given dominion over all the creatures, and over all the world. That dominion expresses authority above all creation. So here too, you see something unique about man that is not shared with anything else in creation. He alone is given dominion over all else. That brings with it stewardship, and it brings with it responsibility, and both of those bring with them accountability with God, to exercise authority under God, in the service of God. And so we see, at the very beginning, indeed the opening chapter of Genesis, that man is made in the image of God.

But then, secondly, let’s consider some of the doctrinal details related to man, as being in the image of God. As we saw in the last lecture, Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 4, paragraph 2 begins with these words: “After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts.” And in the previous lecture, we considered some of the other components in that definition, and here we are focusing especially on the words, “after his own image.” So having considered the nature of man more generally in the last lecture, we’ll turn our attention to what it means for man to be created in the image of God.

First of all, when speaking about these matters, it is more accurate to say that man *is* the image of God, or, alternatively, man *is made in* the image of God, rather than speaking of the image of God *in* man. The image is not something *in* man. Rather, *man is* the image of God. Well, why might this distinction be significant? Why stress these words? Well, because the image constitutes

the essence of man. So it's inseparable from what makes man actually man—what he is—and distinguishes him from the rest of creation.

Secondly, so the question is, of what does the image consist? So how do we define it? What is included in this idea of being the image of God? And to answer this, we need to know how the entrance of sin affected the image. In other words, is man still the image of God after the fall? Or is there any difference before and after the fall, as it relates to man as the image of God? Well, in consulting the whole of Scripture, like we do in Systematic Theology, we discover that there is both a *broad* aspect and a *narrow* aspect to man as the image of God. So let's consider those.

The broad aspect of what it means for man to be the image of God. So we open our Bibles, and we learn that after the fall, we read, in Genesis, chapter 9, verse 6, these words: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." So this is speaking about murder, obviously, the shedding of a man's blood, and this is the first instance in the Bible of God requiring the death penalty for murder. But what I want to especially highlight here is that the words say, "for in the image of God made he man." So it's giving us the reason—it's giving us purpose. Why is it that someone who murders another person should be executed? The Lord says the reason is because the person that he has murdered is the image of God—"in the image of God made he man." And so this is underlining the fact that well, here we are in Genesis 9, after the fall, and God, in the context of sin, even sin as grievous as murder, God is saying that man is still considered the image of God. Well, to give you another example, we can fast-forward to the New Testament. We come to James, chapter 3, and in James 3, as you'll remember, the Lord is dealing with our tongue, he's speaking about our mouth, our speech and its significance, and the importance of having godly speech. And in the course of that chapter, we read, in verse 9, "There-with bless we God, even the Father; and therewith"—that is, our mouth—"curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." So here we have something very similar, it's parallel to Genesis, chapter 9. But now it's speaking about what we do with our mouth, not with our hand. We curse men, and we're attacking them. So we're not actually killing them, but we're cursing them, and the Lord uses the same reasoning in both places. He says, it is inappropriate to murder or take the life of an innocent person, because you're attacking the image of God; and here in James 3, He says, it is sinful and wrong to curse men, because they're made after the similitude or likeness, in the image of God. In James 3, we see that God considers man, after the fall, to still be the image of God. A similar passage would also be 1 Corinthians 11, verse 7. And so clearly, from this, we see that man still remains the image of God after the fall. And what does that entail? What does that include? Well, it's reinforcing the fact that man is still, after the fall, an immortal, spiritual being. He was when God created him, he still is after the fall. Likewise, man retains his faculties as a moral, rational creature. That's not lost in the fall. He's still has a moral nature. He still has rational capabilities. He still has the function of intellect and will, and so on.

So we learn from this, in our study of Scripture, that when God says that man is the image of God, made in the image of God, it includes, first of all, this broad aspect. That he is that image means that he is an immortal spiritual being, that he has the faculties of being a moral, rational creature, with the functions of intellect and will, and so on. So that would be the broad aspect of the image of God.

But then, we also need to consider the narrow aspect. Because, as we continue to study our Bibles, we come across passages like this—in Colossians 3, verse 10, we read: "And have put on"—speaking of the believer—"and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Interesting. So we're being told that the believer, who's

come under the power of the gospel, is actually being renewed, or regaining something that had been lost. And that something, in this case—it's spoken of as knowledge, or spiritual knowledge—that that is defined in terms of being part of the image of God that created him. Again, similarly, in Ephesians 4, verse 24, speaking of the believer, it says, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God's created in righteousness and true holiness." So what is this? What we're learning is that there's something was lost in the fall, and that it is that something that can only be regained or renewed in conversion. So there's an aspect of the image being lost at the fall, and regained in Christ. And this, of course, has to be connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of the language that's used in reference to Jesus, in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 4, where it says, "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." So here we have, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the preeminent, perfect, beautiful display and model of what it is to be the image of God. And so Christ is set before us as the standard, and the believer is being transformed. So that same book, 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18, says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." So God is describing something. He's saying that the believer is being transformed; they're being renewed; they're being changed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, from glory to glory, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, this is an important part of what salvation entails. And in our study of the Doctrine of Salvation in a future course, we'll explore this in detail. But you see it Romans 8, verse 29, when it says, "For whom he"—that is, God—"did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." And so here is God's purpose. He's predestinated a people unto salvation, in order that they would be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so here we're learning that there's also this narrow aspect of the image of God, that the image also included spiritual knowledge—we saw that in Colossians—and righteousness, and holiness. And this spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness was lost at the fall, and it is regained through the gospel, in conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. So if you think back to that passage we noted in Westminster Confession, chapter 2, paragraph 4, this language is actually woven into that paragraph, isn't it? When it's speaking about man being made in the image of God, it also uses the language of "knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,"—that's language lifted out of Colossians and Ephesians. And so, what constitutes the image of God? Well, there's a broad aspect—man is a spiritual, immortal being, with rational and moral faculties, but also, he was created with true spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

But we also have to note that He speaks of dominion—dominion over the creatures. He uses it almost in the same breath, in that passage, in Genesis 1:26—"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea," and so on. And so dominion is connected to this image. Dominion is describing a function. So man, created in the image of God, is created with a capacity for the responsibility of dominion. So man is to serve as deputy under God. He's to serve as God's vice-regent, as the image-bearer of God, exercising this function of dominion over the world. Now we sing about this in Psalm 8, in verse 4 and following, it says, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." And so, man being the image of God, and called to exercise dominion, is part of God crowning him with glory and with honor. God's put all things under the feet of men.

You say to yourself, Well, it doesn't feel like that, it doesn't seem like that. It doesn't seem as if man has all things put under his feet, that he actually exercises rightly and comprehensively over all the works of God's hands, and so on. What about that? Why is that the case? How is that the case? Well, the answer is given to us in the New Testament. In Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, you have the author to the Hebrews quotes this Psalm—Psalm 8—and he says, “Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.” So there you have that same question that we're asking ourselves: “But now we see not yet all things put under him.” Well, the passage continues: “But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus.” So here is the One, the God-man, who comes with perfect humanity, and He occupies that supreme place, and He actually brings about the fulfillment, as the One who is the image of God. He brings about the fulfillment of that original call to exercise dominion. And here is Jesus bringing that to pass. He is actually causing dominion to unfold. And so, you sing in Psalm 72 about how His dominion—Christ's—is from sea to sea, and that the Lord Jesus is given all power and authority in heaven and on earth, and in Psalm 110, that all of His enemies, even, will be put under His feet, and so on. So these things are regained. The capability for dominion is secured in the person of Christ.

I'll also mentioned, just in passing, from Genesis, that man is in the image of God, given the responsibility of dominion, that comes in the context of what we call the creation ordinances, as well. So there are four creation ordinances. There is, first of all, marriage. You see that in Genesis 2, verses 23 and 24. And there is procreation, Genesis 1:28. Right after he tells them to have dominion, he says, “Be fruitful and multiply.” You have the creation ordinance of labor, in Genesis 2, verses 15, 19, and 20, where a man has to serve the Lord in the world through his labor. And the fourth creation ordinance is Sabbath observance—the opening verses of Genesis, chapter 2, verses 2 and 3. And that too, all of these is a part of this and connected to this concept of serving God as His image-bearers.

So in summary, we learned that there's a narrow aspect to the image of God, that's spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, which was lost at the fall, and regained in conversion; and there's a broad aspect that refers to man's rational, moral nature, which is maintained after the fall, and that, as such—as the image of God—man exercises dominion over creation.

Well next, we must consider some errors that arise related to man as God's image-bearer. And first of all, I want to highlight, within historical theology, some diverse views, from what we've gleaned from Scripture.

So during the Reformation era, there was a group called the Socinians, and they were heretics; they denied that Jesus was God; they denied the substitutionary atonement, and other things. They said that the image of God consisted entirely in man's dominion over the creatures—that that's all that it was. And so therefore, the image of God was not lost at the fall. So they're wrong, because the image of God is not equivalent to man's dominion, and they're wrong, because the image was not entirely retained after the fall.

But then we have the Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholics say that the image consists in man's rational, moral nature—what we were calling the broad aspect—and that the image is not at all lost at the fall. So similar to the Socinians, they would say it's not lost at the fall, because it's just his moral, rational nature. And they would speak about a superadded spiritual gift that was given to Adam in righteousness and holiness, and so on. And those, of course, are lost at the fall, but they're not part of the image. And so you can see the problem there, they have the broad aspect, but not the narrow aspect.

The Lutherans actually go the other direction. They would say that the image consists only in spiritual knowledge, righteousness and holiness, and therefore, the image was completely lost at the fall, and so man is not the image of God anymore after the fall, and that it is only regained at conversion. So they have the narrow aspect but not the broad aspect.

And so, placing what we've learned—the Biblical and Reformed position on the image of God—you can set it against the backdrop and see how people have gone off one direction or the other.

Secondly, to deal with a contemporary issue, we should acknowledge that evolution eliminates the concept of man as the image of God altogether. How so? Well, they would say that there isn't a fundamental difference between people and animals, that they're all on the same plain, that people are just more highly evolved animals. Well the implications of this are tragic, aren't they? Because we've noted that God has crowned man with glory and honor, that man has inherent dignity, as those made in the image of God. And so, if you deny that, man loses his inherent value, his worth, and his dignity. Think about the impact upon ethics. When a lion eats a gazelle on the plains of Africa, no one cries out that something morally reprehensible has happened. You just have one animal doing to another animal what's natural to them; they're acting according to their instincts, and so on. There's no moral implication in it. But if man is not the image of God, with value, and dignity, and so on; if man is only an animal, then what one person does to another person is of no moral consequence. It's just one animal doing to another animal what's in keeping with their instincts. And, of course, we say, absolutely not! Indeed, even the evolutionists would cringe at this thought, to say that well, murder, and rape, and kidnapping, and all of these other things are not morally wrong. Everyone knows, everyone has a sense that there is something different, there is something distinct, there is something special, there is something valuable about human life, that human life is precious, that people do have dignity. And so there's a sense of that. But their ideas—the idea of evolution—completely guts that, completely undermines that, and we need to make that clear to those who are walking in unbelief. The Bible provides us with the reason. What is it that constitutes the essence of man? The fact that he's made in the image of God, and therefore, all of the matters of dignity and value flow from that.

Fourthly, we can now draw some practical applications, some brief applications for ourselves. You know, what is man's glory? Well, ultimately man's glory has to be attached to likeness to God, because God Himself is the One who is glory. He is the definition of glory, and of honor, and of majesty, and so on. And any glory that man has is derived from God, as those made in His image. Well this underlines the importance of why, therefore, we shouldn't be content just with being moral, rational creatures, but we desperately need, as fallen sinners who have defaced the image by our sin, and the loss of knowledge, righteousness and holiness, and things that are associated with that. It shows us our great need for the Holy Spirit. It shows us our great need for a saving work to take place in our souls. We need to be converted, we need a heart of stone taken out and a heart of flesh to be put in. We need a new nature. We need the principle of grace planted within us. We need to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We need restoration. We need the Holy Spirit to come and renew and recreate us into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is glory. When we speak about the Christian going to heaven, they're glorified—they go into glory. What's happening? Well, you have the completion of salvation—body and soul perfectly resurrected, sinless, and perfectly conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. The believer has glory, will have glory in heaven, unlike any glory seen before. But it comes as a consequence of the saving work of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we see the preciousness of Christ. Christ is the image of God, and He reveals true

glory to us. And so we're blind, and we're ignorant, and we're deaf without the Lord Jesus Christ. We need the knowledge of Him, we need to see Him, we need to see Him by faith as He's revealed in the Scriptures. We need to see Him truly and accurately, as the Bible portrays Him to us. We need to learn from Him, we need to study Him, because Christ is the model, if you will, who sets before us what it is to be the image of God. You see here how the study of the Doctrine of Man is actually providing us with some foundation stones, isn't it, for what we're going to study later in the Doctrine of Salvation. We'll come to the Doctrine of Sanctification, where we study the work of the Spirit in killing sin within the believer, and causing them to grow in righteousness, and all the while, conforming them into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, to understand all that we're going to explore in the Doctrines of Salvation, you have to have some knowledge of the Doctrine of Man, and specifically to our point, what it means for man to be made in the image of God. I want you to see the way in which all of these things are interconnected.

And then lastly, as I've already noted, we need, as Christians, we need to make loud and clear to the world the inherent value of people. For people have inherent value, as those made in the image of God. And that means people shouldn't be treated like objects. You know, we can use people for ourselves, we can use them for our own ends and purposes, reducing them to something like an object. No, the believer recognizes a person is one made in the image of God, and they're to be treated with dignity, and with all of the appropriate responses to what that entails. And that's important for us as Christians, it's important for our witness as well.

Well, in this lecture, we have explored Man as the Image of God, and this another important building block to add to what we've seen about the general nature of mankind. In the next lecture, we're going to turn our consideration to the Biblical doctrine of man's freedom of will, so the Freedom of Man's Will. And we're going to consider that from creation to consummation, so what was the nature of the Freedom of Man's Will before the fall, after the fall, in conversion, and in glory.

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 4*

### **The Freedom of Man's Will**

Let me begin with a question: Why do we do what we do? Now, I'm speaking broadly. In all the various situations and circumstances of life, the little things and the big things, what prompts us to do the things we do? Well that is a far more difficult question than we sometimes realize. Why? Well, because there are many complex factors—various layers of motivations within us that influence our decisions. It is true that circumstances outside of us, including other people, may impact us. But in the end, we decide to do what we do. They are our decisions that flow from our own motivations. Ultimately, we do what we want to do, and what we want is the real issue. Consequently, we have to know something about our heart to ascertain the reason behind our actions. Jesus notes this, in reference to our words. He says, “Out of the heart the mouth speaketh.” The heart is the source for our speech. The mouth is a window to the soul. As someone aptly said, the matter of the heart is the heart of the matter. The exercise of our will is the fruit, but our spiritual nature is the root from which our will springs.

Well this series of lectures, in this third module, or course, on Systematic Theology, is devoted to the study of the doctrine of man. So the purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about man, before and after the fall and the entrance of sin into the world. In this present lecture, we will explore the doctrine of The Freedom of Man's Will.

So first of all, we will begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture, to open up our consideration of the Freedom of Man's Will. In Romans 3, verses 10 to 12, we read, “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” In the opening chapters of Romans, especially beginning at chapter 1, verse 18, Paul lays out the desperate condition of fallen men. He shows that both Jews and Greeks are in a state of sin and alienated from God, due to their transgressions of God's law. In doing so, he is setting the bleak background of man's spiritual need, before he goes on to open up and expound the wonder of the gospel, beginning with justification by faith alone, apart from the deeds of the law. In the passage we cited, here in Romans 3, Paul says, “As it is written.” So he's quoting—he's quoting the authoritative Scriptures of the Old Testament, and specifically, he begins by drawing from Psalm 14 and Psalm 58. God included these words in the songs that we are to sing, so that they would be deeply implanted in our hearts and minds. We must see our great need for a Savior, and for the salvation he has secured. Well, how bad is our need? Worse than you think. Notice the words, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” This speaks to the natural man's character, or fallen, sinful, unconverted man's nature, that he is not righteous, that there are none that have righteousness that is within them, outside of the Lord Jesus Christ. It goes on, “There is none that

understandeth.” Well, this speaks to man’s natural ignorance—his ignorance of spiritual truth, that is, his inability to even see properly what is true. The text says that “none seeketh after God.” So this speaks to man’s disinclination toward God; not a gravitational pull toward the Lord, but rather quite the opposite. There’s hostility; there’s alienation from the Lord. Paul says, all have gone out of the way, and have together become unprofitable. You see man’s waywardness—his proneness to go in the direction of evil. When given the choice, he’s going to choose to go out of the way, in an unprofitable or sinful direction. And then it says there are “none that doeth good, no, not one.” Well, this is a clear statement about the unbeliever’s will. None doeth good, no, not one—speaking of his inability to do what is pleasing to the Lord. Well, notice how, in this passage, it begins with man’s character, or his nature—there are none righteous, and it concludes with the bondage of his will—his inability to do good. And as we will learn in this lecture, the connection between man’s nature and man’s will is very important for understanding this doctrine of the freedom of the will.

Well, secondly, let’s consider some of the doctrinal details regarding the Freedom of Man’s Will, and here we’ll get into the sum and substance of what this doctrine teaches. First, we need to lay out some definitions and distinctions. So in Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 9, paragraph 1, it says, “God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.” The conversation and debate over the freedom of man’s will can generate an enormous amount of confusion. Frequently, people will equivocate, moving from one definition of free will to another, throughout the course of a single conversation. In all of theology, we have to begin with the questions, What do we mean by the word, phrase, concept that we are using, before we proceed to ask, What do the Scriptures about this. And so, I’ll mention a few common uses of the phrase, “free will,” some good, some bad.

First of all, we can define free will in terms of the fact that man makes his own choices without compulsion. So their choices are truly their choices—men are not forced, contrary to their desires. And this is true. This is, in fact, what we saw in the opening paragraph of Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 9. So that’s one example. The second is, that man can do things contrary to God’s choosing, that God cannot interfere with man’s will, or determine what is within his choosing. Thus, man’s will is, in some way, above God’s will. Well, this definition of free will is false, as we’ll come to see. Thirdly, another false definition of free will: unregenerate man has the ability to do what is morally good or evil. This is most often what is meant, when we use the phrase “free will” in theological debate, that we’ll be outlining below. And this is false. The unregenerate man is not able to do what is morally good or evil.

But one way, one helpful way of clarifying this doctrine is to consider the freedom of man’s will through the four states of man’s existence. So we consider the freedom of his will before the fall—that’s the first one; after the fall, in a state of sin—the unconverted person; thirdly, freedom of will after conversion; and then fourthly, the freedom of will of the believer in heaven. So, Augustine, the fourth-century, early church father, explained this in a very clear, concise manner, and subsequent theologians have followed his pattern, including the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 9, on the freedom of the will, as we’ll see. Augustine summarized the freedom of the will in these four states, in a simple way. And he used, of course, Latin—he was writing in a Latin language. I won’t give you the Latin phrases, but the English translations of them. In the first state, in man’s innocency, before the fall, man was able not to sin—he was able not to sin. In the second state, after the fall, the unbeliever outside of Christ is not able not to sin—not able not to sin. In the third category, the believer, after he or she has been brought to faith and repentance, and



converted, they are able to sin and not to sin—so, able to sin and not to sin. And then the fourth category would be the believer in heaven, and there, the believer is not able to sin—not able to sin at all. So we'll consider each of these, following the teaching outlined in Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 9.

First of all, that first state of man, prior to the fall, in the garden. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 9, paragraph 2, says this: “Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good, and well pleasing to God; but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it.” So Adam was created perfect. He was without a sinful nature. He had, as we've seen in a previous lecture, spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. He had the freedom of will to do what is good. He had the ability not to sin. But that ability was mutable, that is, it was able to change—meaning, he had the ability, he also had the ability of freedom to sin. This comes out in Ecclesiastes 7, verse 29: Solomon says, “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions”—or many schemes or sinful devices. So that's the first state.

The second state is after the fall—man in sin. Westminster Confession, chapter 9, paragraph 3, says, “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.” In the words of Augustine, “The unconverted sinner is not able not to sin.” In other words, he has the ability to only do evil, and not to do good. Now we saw this clearly in Romans, chapter 3, where Paul says, “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that seeketh after God; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” We see it in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Or you think of Paul's words to the Ephesians, in Ephesians 2, verse 1, speaking of the believer, he says, “And you hath he quickened,”—and then he talks about their past—“who were dead in trespasses and sin.” He says, you were previous dead in trespasses and sin. God had to come and enliven you. He goes on, in verses 2 and 3, to speak about the unbeliever as “children of disobedience,” and “children of wrath.” So that's the second state of man.

The third state is post-conversion, or after a person is born again and brought to faith and repentance in Christ. Westminster Confession, chapter 9, paragraph 4, says, “When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.” So the believer, in a state of saving grace, is able to sin, and able not to sin. He has the freedom of will to do both good and evil. Paul states this graphically, when he describes the experience of the believer, in Romans, chapter 7, verses 15 to 25. And there, Paul is talking about this war that is within him. There's indwelling sin, the presence of sin that still remains within the heart and life of the believer, but they also have a principle of grace that's been planted in them, so that they delight in the law of God after the inward man, and desire to please Him, but there's this struggle because of the presence of the law of sin, and it creates war. Paul says there are times when he desires to do what is good, but he doesn't do it. He desires not to do what is sinful, and he does do it. And so there's this mix of both ability to do good, and ability to do evil. In the previous chapter, Romans 6, you see this in verses 18 and 22: “Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness, . . . but now being made free from sin”—he goes

on—“and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting.” Here is the freedom of will or ability to do what is good. Well, where does this ability come from in the believer? Philippians 2, verse 13 says, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will”—there’s the will—“both to will and to do his good pleasure.”

The fourth category is the believer in heaven—the fourth state is the believer in heaven. Westminster Confession, chapter 9, paragraph 5, says, “The will of man then is made perfectly and immutably”—unchangeably—“free to do good alone, in the state of glory only.” So the believer in heaven is not able to sin. He has the ability only to do good, not evil, and that is unchangeably the case. Hebrews 12, verse 23 says, “To the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all”—listen!—“and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” The soul is perfected in holiness, upon its entrance into heaven. Jude 24 says, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.” John says something similar, in 1 John 3, verse 2, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” And so the believer in heaven is in a state where he is not able to sin.

In summary, it’s helpful to think about the freedom of man’s will, in each of these four states. And one reason this is very important is because it makes crystal clear that man’s ability to do or choose is determined, or limited, by his inner character, or nature. Man cannot choose anything, but he can choose what is natural to him, and what he desires to do. So for example, you know, we might say that a dog is free to fly. So you look at the dog, and you say, “Okay, you can fly; you’re free to do so. Go ahead, fly if you’d like to fly,” but a dog is unable to fly—it’s not in its nature, and therefore, not in its ability to fly. Similarly, we could say to a dead man—someone who’s died—we could speak to a dead body, and say that it is free to run, to get up and run across the room. But of course, in that state of deadness, the man is unable to run. So the unbeliever’s fallen nature, outside of Christ, puts him in a position of bondage, not freedom; slavery, not liberty. When it comes to doing what is pleasing to the Lord, he is spiritually dead. He does not have the inherent ability or freedom of will to come to God, or exercise saving faith, or any of those things, without God’s divine intervention. There’s a connection between man’s nature and man’s will. In his innocency, it was of his nature to have the ability not to sin, and the ability to sin. In the state of fallen mankind, his nature, which is dead to God, is unable—he doesn’t have freedom of will—to do what is good, he only does what is evil. But then the believer is given a new nature in that third state, he’s given a new heart. The principle of grace is planted in him. He’s given the presence of the Holy Spirit, and so on. And that nature enables him, makes his will free to do both good or evil. And, of course, in the confirmed and consummated state of heaven, the nature of man is such that he is not able to sin.

Well, thirdly, next, we must consider a few errors that arise related to the Freedom of the Will. And first of all, one false view is that man’s will is uncaused, so that nothing determines what we do. You’ll see this within the history of philosophy. So nothing, including God, myself, my environment, my training, or anything else impacts what I do. We are free to go against all inclinations. If this were consistent, everything would ultimately be left to happenstance and accidents. Man would be in a ship, without a rudder, at sea, in a tempestuous storm. Well, this undermines moral responsibility; it undermines all culpability. It’s absurd as a consequence—where it leads, leads to absurdity.

Secondly, another error, the Arminian—those who hold to Arminian theology, will object. If we believe in the bondage of the will of fallen, unconverted men, that he is unable to do good, then

they will say, “He is subject to external compulsion, and does not freely choose what he wants.” But you see, this fails to recognize the connection between man’s nature and man’s ability. Unconverted man’s fallen nature controls his abilities. He does choose, he does choose freely whatever he wants, but in a state of sin, he can only want what is displeasing to God. I mean, you can even think, by way of analogy, of God himself. His nature is holy and just and righteous. He can only and inescapably do what is good. But he is not subject to external compulsion outside of himself to do so. It is who he is, to be good. He is good, and therefore, does good. And so, by way of parallel, the natural man is sinful, and therefore, he does what is sinful. His will is not free to do what is good—it’s in bondage to what is evil.

Thirdly, those that assert that the power of contrary choice—so this idea of having the power of contrary choice, to choose to the contrary—is the supreme moral value. Well, for those that say that that is the supreme moral value, they fail to grasp the significance of the Biblical notion of gracious redemption itself. The wonder of the gospel is that God gives life to those who are spiritually dead; that he gives sight to those who are blind; that he gives saving knowledge to those who are ignorant; that he takes out a heart of stone, in order that he might give a heart of flesh; that he gives his Holy Spirit unto souls. God’s grace gives us the ability to glorify God, where previously there was inability to glorify him.

Well fourthly, and lastly, we can now draw some practical applications for ourselves—just a handful. First of all, we have to recognize the relationship between a high view of God, and a low view of man. People left to themselves are going to invert that. They’re going to have a high view of man—of his ability, of his freedom, of his power, and so on; and have a very low view of God. The Bible turns that right-side-up. The Bible gives us a high view of God, and a low view of man. Man’s natural condition outside of Christ is far worse than anyone realizes. They are spiritually dead—dead to God, and dead to all that is good. But not only is the bad news worse than people think, the good news is better than people realize. Because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The gospel is God coming and raising those who were dead. God comes in the gospel, and he gives his people abilities to serve him, to honor him, to worship him, to please him, to glorify him. The wonder of the gospel is seen in what God does, and in the unsearchable riches of his grace that are dispensed to needy sinners. This also reinforces, doesn’t it, the inescapable necessity of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” We can never emphasize enough the necessity of the new birth—of that sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of a man, woman, boy, or girl, bringing them to life. It is the necessity of the Holy Spirit that is accentuated by this doctrine.

But then lastly, for the believer—the believer is left with the hope, and joy, and anticipation of heaven. What is it that gives the believer grief in this world? It is sin. Misery comes in the wake of sin, and even in our holy engagements, in worship, and in all of the things that we seek to do in the service of God, are tainted with sin, and there’s the influence of sin, and the evidence of sin, and it grieves and breaks the heart of the true Christian. But they have this hope, and they have this joy in anticipating heaven. And one of the wonders of heaven is that they will no longer be able to sin. They’ll be without sin, perfected in holiness—a complete salvation of body and soul, and able to worship and serve and live to God’s glory, without any ability to displease him or to dishonor him. And that ought to strengthen our hearts, as John says, in the first few verses of 1 John 3. The thought of that should set us to work, in terms of purifying our hearts, and seeking to pursue holiness and godliness in this present age—to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness.

In this lecture, we have explored The Freedom of Man’s Will. This paves the way for what is to

follow. In the next lecture, we'll turn our consideration to man's fallen condition, beginning with the Biblical doctrine of The Nature of Sin.

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 5*

### **The Nature of Sin**

There are several international classical music competitions that are held throughout the year. One of the most famous is the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto. And you will have competitors who come from various countries. They'll have spent their whole entire life, hours and hours a day, seeking to master the piano, the instrument of the piano. And they'll have trained under some of the best teachers in all of the world. There's a great deal of stress, a great deal of buildup, a great deal of pressure in coming to competitions like this, and everything hangs in the balance—the whole career that they've been seeking to build. And there will be a panel of judges that will be present, along with an audience, for this competition. And if they make one mistake, if they miss a single note in a very long and very complex piece, they are immediately disqualified. The least infraction could result in their whole life's work being lost as a result of it. Well there are many other examples of the same sort of thing: people that have studied hard in school, and preparing for a significant entrance exam to a prestigious university that they want to attend, or many other examples, where they're put to the test, and the smallest mistake could have catastrophic implications for their future and their life.

This illustrates for us something about the Nature of Sin. God has given to us his holy law, and that law works its way, by way of application, into the deepest crevices of man's being. And what we learn in the Bible is that the smallest infraction, the failure to do one thing that the law requires, or a failure in violating even the least of what God's law forbids results in catastrophic implications. Sinners are justly, equitably, and fairly condemned for the least sin. God's standard is high, demanding of all of his creatures. And we have a sense of the weight then, and the significance of what sin is.

Well, this series of lectures in this third module on Systematic Theology is devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Man. So the purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about man, both before and after the fall and the entrance of sin into the world. In the last few lectures, we've considered aspects of the Nature of Man. In the present lecture, we will explore the doctrine of the Nature of Sin. And we'll begin, first of all, by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture in order to open up our consideration of the Nature of Sin.

In Acts, chapter 12, the end of that chapter, verses 21 to 24, we read: “And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied.” So we are drawing from a particular account and personal narrative this time, in the opening of this lecture. Why? Why are we doing that? Be-

cause it provides a vivid illustration of the doctrine that we'll be expounding in this lecture. The account about Herod is very similar to the Old Testament example of Nebuchadnezzar, which you can read about in Daniel 4, verses 28 to 37. You'll remember, there, Nebuchadnezzar is walking about his palace, and he's speaking about how he has the greatest kingdom in the world, and that his kingdom is spread far and wide, and he's heaped to himself power and riches, and so on. The Lord does something similar with Nebuchadnezzar. He too is struck down and sent like a beast into the field for seven years, where his hair grows, and his nails grow, and he's humbled under God's hand. Well, what is vividly exemplified here, in the case of Herod, reflects really the universal nature of sin. So we're taking one example, of one man, and one sin, in order that we might, through that example, see something about the nature of sin itself.

Well, you'll notice a few things. You'll notice that natural man's estimation of himself is grossly inflated. As we've learned in a previous lecture, the minds of men are darkened and blind, unable to see themselves truly. So rather than seeing their need, rather than seeing their sin, they create a figment of imagination, in esteeming themselves more highly than they ought. Now, this is true of all men. All men minimize their sins and maximize the things that they think are virtuous or commendable.

Secondly, we see that all sin deifies man—it's an attempt for man to take the place of God. Sin enthrones self, and it dethrones God. It displaces God's rule, and replaces it with man's rule. Man ends up being the determining factor of what should be and shouldn't be done, and he makes decisions with a false sense of his own autonomy, that he has ability to determine things for himself. And this is an attack on God himself.

Thirdly, man, therefore, cannot take credit for anything, without depriving God of his honor. You'll notice how that passage in Acts 12 says, "the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory." So he was smitten because of a failure to do something positive—to give God glory. And this ties to what Paul says, in Romans 3, verse 23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." So sin is not just having a high estimation of ourself, it's not just dethroning God, but it is also an attack on the glory of God itself. All sin is directed first and foremost against God himself.

Fourthly, we see that sin is, in its essence, a violation of God's law. So in this case, which of the Ten Commandments are being violated? Well, clearly, the first commandment is being violated—"Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" and the second commandment is being violated, because he's receiving worship to himself. Now we could say that the third commandment is being violated and some of the others as well. But my point here is that sin has to be seen as a violation of an objective standard of God's law summarized in the Ten Commandments.

And then fifthly, we see that sin brings guilt, and that guilt requires punishment, in this life and the life to come. God is just, he is holy, he is righteous, and where guilt is found, that guilt must be satisfied with a penalty. In the case of Herod, he was punished in this life—he was eaten with worms and died; and he was punished in the life to come—he went to hell as well. So this little brief narrative in Acts 12 serves as a window to open up for us something about the Nature of Sin.

And so secondly, let's consider some of the doctrinal details regarding the Nature of Sin, and here we'll get into the substance of this doctrine. So first of all, sin and God's moral law. Sin can only properly be defined by reference to the moral law of God, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments. The essence of sin is violating the absolute, objective, revealed will of God. The Bible teaches this. In 1 John 3, verse 4, we read: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." So there's the Bible's definition: sin is the transgression of the law. You can compare that, for example, to Romans 4, verse 15. Similarly, we read in

Romans 3, verse 20: “for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” So, if we’re going to understand sin, if we’re going to be able to define it properly, to recognize it, to see it in ourselves, in the world, in others, we’re only going to have that knowledge of sin through the law, because it’s a violation of the law. So the Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly teaches, in its answer to question 14, “Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.” So any want of conformity—lack of conformity—unto, or transgression of the law of God. Sin is the failure of full conformity to the standard of holiness in the law. Now, each commandment brings with it both things that it requires, and things that it forbids. So, for example, it may say, “Thou shalt not steal.” So it’s prohibiting or forbidding something. But in each commandment, the opposite, the positive is also required. So rather than just stealing, we need to actually preserve the property, and time, and other resources of our neighbor, and of those that are around us, to state it briefly. Similarly, in the fifth commandment, it says, “Thou shalt honour thy father and mother”—that’s a positive command; the negative is also required. So that forbids therefore, the dishonoring, disobeying, disrespecting of our parents, or lawful authority. So each commandment has things that it requires and forbids. And if you look at the Westminster Shorter Catechism, when it’s expounding the Ten Commandments, it provides us with questions: What does this commandment require? Another question: What does this commandment forbid?

We also need to recognize the spiritual nature of the law. So it doesn’t just apply to our hand, it also applies to our heart and our head. It penetrates into every crevice of our being. Jesus makes this clear in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5, when he’s expounding the Ten Commandments, he’s saying, The law says, Thou shalt not commit adultery, but if you look upon a woman to lust after her, you’ve committed adultery in your heart. You see how the spiritual nature of the law goes down into our motives, and our thoughts, and our words, and our ambitions, and so on.

We can also note then, that every sin can be traced back to one or more of the Ten Commandments. Every sin in the whole world is connected in one way or another to one or more of the Ten Commandments. And here, what might be helpful, is to look at the Westminster Larger Catechism, which is much bigger than the Shorter, and its exposition of the Ten Commandments. And you’ll note that there are long answers to what sins are forbidden, and what duties are required. And what’s happening is that the Westminster Assembly was going through the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and it was looking for examples of various types of sin, both internal and external, that derive from the Ten Commandments. And they string them all together to give us a more searching, thorough understanding of that commandment.

It can be helpful, for example, in a simpler way, it can be helpful to think of two categories of sin, in relationship to the law. We have on one side, sins of commission. You might notice, in English, the word “commit” there—so sins of commission. Those sins are doing what the law forbids. On the other hand, we have sins of omission. In English, you can see the word “omit” there—sins of omission. And those sins are leaving undone what the law demands of us. As you can see, the word “ought”—what you ought to do, or ought not to do—has no meaning apart from a norm from a law. Ultimately, because the law reflects the character of God, the Ten Commandments are a transcript of God’s holiness; well then, to violate the law is to attack God himself.

Well there are several Biblical words for “sin” in the Old and New Testaments. These words for sin are translated into a variety of different English synonyms. You have lawlessness, transgression, iniquity, unrighteousness, evil, rebellion, wickedness, debt, and so on. But a few of the Hebrew words, in the Hebrew language that are translated “sin” convey helpful pictures about the nature of sin. One of those words is a word that means “to miss the mark.” So picture having a

bow and arrow, and pulling the arrow back, and you let the arrow fly, and you miss the target, you miss the bull's-eye on the target—it goes to the right or to the left. That's a picture of missing the mark. That's the nature of sin. The bull's-eye, if you will, is the law of God. Another word means "crooked" or "bent." So rather than straight, walking straight, according to the will of God, there's a crookedness and a bentness. A third word means "to exceed boundaries." So God has given, in his law, boundaries that we are to live within, and when we cross those boundaries, we are sinning. So these are some examples of helpful pictures for us in understanding the relationship of sin to the law.

Secondly, sin, law, and love. So law and love are not opposites. There is an inextricable connection between them. Understand this connection further opens up our insight into the Nature of Sin. The Lord summarized the moral law in terms of love—Matthew 22, verses 37 to 40, "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." So here is Christ summarizing the first four commandments as love to God, and then commandments 5 to 10 as love for our neighbor.

For the believer, love is expressed by obedience to the law, not as a way unto salvation, like earning of salvation, but as the fruit of gratitude for the salvation that the believer has received. That's why Paul can say, in Romans 7, that the law is holy, just and good, and that he delights in it after the inward man. Similar language to David, in Psalm 119, "Oh, how I love thy law." Love for God results in love for the character of God that is seen in the law. So Christ says to his disciples, in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Likewise, we read in 1 John 5, verse 3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous"—they're not burdensome to the believer. It's a law of liberty, as Paul says elsewhere. In building on this, Paul goes on to say, in Romans 13, verse 10, "therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." We can't actually see the law fulfilled in its totality without love—love for God and our neighbor—being at the heart of it, and emanating through all that we do.

So this makes clear the Nature of Sin, that it is radically opposed to love. Second commandment, Exodus 20, verse 5, speaks of God "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Hate me—it's the opposite of love, sin is. So sin is not just against law, sin is relational. It is against God himself. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he had killed, murdered Uriah, her husband, and when he speaks about this, in Psalm 51, verses 3 and 4, he says, "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." David saw that the sin against Bathsheba, against Uriah, against Israel, against his house, and so on, was ultimately sin against God. Indeed, the Bible refers to sin, one of the common pictures frequently used—the imagery in the Old Testament, is that of harlotry—of whoredom. Sin is harlotry, it's whoredom, idolatry is depicted in gross and disgusting ways. The Nature of Sin is something defiling and that reviles God—something that should be repugnant to the believer's heart, the idea, the grossness of a harlot or a whore—this is the character of sin, not true love, quite the opposite.

Thirdly, we need to think about the relationship of sin and guilt. So guilt, the word, as a theological term, expresses the relationship of sin to the penalty of the law. So when we say "guilt" it's not the subjective feeling of guiltiness, but the objective fact of being found guilty of breaking God's law. You know, if a criminal comes to court and stands before a judge, and the judge says,



“I declare you guilty,” he’s not speaking about the internal feelings of the criminal. He may or may not feel guilty about what he did. He’s making a declaration about the criminal’s actions in relationship to law—he’s broken the law, he’s guilty.

And there’s a twofold aspect to guilt, and this may be helpful for us. First of all, we think of guilt, theologically, as the intrinsic moral evil. So here we’re talking about the essence of sin, or the sinfulness of sin, of our fallen state. This is something that is permanently a part of every sinful deed and action. It is an intrinsic moral evil, and it is a violation of God’s law—all sin everywhere. So this pertains to unworthiness, and it pertains to demerit, and it pertains to deserving punishment. This is of the essence of sin. It cannot be removed from the essence of sin. So the believer is forgiven, and the believer is justified, declared righteous by God, but that does not change the Nature of Sin itself, in this first aspect of guilt.

But then secondly, a second aspect is not the essence of sin, but it’s relation to the penal sanction of the law. So it requires the actual penalty, punishment, and satisfaction of God’s wrath, for violating the law. And this guilt, this aspect of guilt can be vicariously removed. It can be removed. It can be transferred from the sinner and credited to the account of Christ, as a substitute. That penalty and punishment is borne by Christ, and God’s wrath is satisfied, for violation of the law. That guilt is therefore removed from the believer. And this is the most common use of the word “guilt” in theology.

I’ll just say briefly that along with this guilt, we also have the pollution of sin—the stains of sin, the defilement of sin. And this is twofold. Negatively, the absence of original righteousness, which Adam had before the fall, and positively, the real presence of sin, as a staining, polluting, defiling influence upon us.

Fourthly, we can think about the relationship of the Nature of Sin and punishment. So we’ve noted that guilt demands punishment for sin, something that is removed in the believer’s life. That punishment can take place in this world, and it can take place both inwardly and outwardly. So punishment in this world takes place inwardly, the Bible says, through things like blindness of the mind, being given over to a reprobate mind, strong delusions, hardness of heart, the horror of conscience, vile affections—those are punishments. Outwardly, it can also happen, the curse of God upon his creatures. All of the evils that befall us in our bodies, our names, our estates, our relations, and employments, and death itself. We saw that with Herod; the Lord struck him and he was eaten with worms. So those are punishments in this world.

But then there are the punishments in the world to come: everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God; grievous torments in soul and body forever. Not only does the Lord’s omnipresence include hell, he alone reigns over it, though his comforting presence is withheld from that place. And the manifestations of his justice, righteousness, wrath, and indignation are expressed there.

Fifthly, there’s a relationship of sin and misery. Sin and misery always go together. The consequences of the entrance of sin at the fall brought great misery. Where sin is, misery is—where misery is, sin is. Where sin is removed, misery is removed. But in the entrance of sin at the fall, think of the great misery. It resulted in the loss of communion with God. It resulted in God’s displeasure and curse. It made, by nature, men to be children of wrath. It made them bondslaves to Satan. This is misery. It brought death—the mortality of the body; secondly, spiritual death, through the corruption of the soul, and then of course, the sentence of eternal death. It made them justly liable to all the punishments in this world, and that to come. And this gives us a cursory summary of the Nature of Sin.

Thirdly, next, we must consider some errors related to the Nature of Sin. First of all, God alone has authority to define sin—we saw that it's defined in his law. So when we refuse to call something sin that God calls sin, or alternatively, when we call something sin that God does not call sin, we are usurping God's authority and taking it for ourselves. We have to stick to the book, to the Bible, in terms of defining sin—not adding a list of things that God doesn't say are sinful, and making those taboos sinful; nor failing to call sinful what God calls sinful. So there's lots of confusion. The world and the church miss the mark on both sides. They'll excuse things as not important that God says are important, and then they'll elevate other things that God has not called sin.

Secondly, contrary to natural man, we need to understand that sin is not just human weakness, it's not just mistakes that people make, it's not oversight or other foibles—it is an attack on God's very character and being. And if we're going to think Biblically, we need to think on those terms, that it is an attack on God himself. That shows the seriousness of it.

Thirdly, it helps us in what we'll eventually consider in the module on the Doctrine of Salvation. It helps set the background for the nature of salvation. Salvation must address real guilt. It's not just moral reformation—people trying to do things a little better than they did before, or stop doing things that they were doing wrong. No, there's guilt here—a penalty must be paid. There's an atonement, a substitutionary atonement that is necessary. This actually places Christ's substitutionary atonement at the center of the gospel, and at the center of the Bible. We need a perfect righteousness that is in perfect keeping with God's law credited to our account—the righteousness of Christ, and we need our sin to be atoned for, and for Christ to satisfy God's wrath against them.

Well, fourthly, we can now draw some practical application for ourselves. First, we need to grasp the abhorrent Nature of Sin. We need to see sin as the evil of evils, cultivating a hatred for sin, as harlotry, and as against God himself. We need to feel the weight of sin. It's not abstract, it's not just vague, it's not just something here and there. We need to think about the details of every single sin is a gigantic mountain or weight upon us. As the Bible says, our sins go way above our heads, that they are more than the number of hairs that we have on our head. As the psalmist says, in Psalm 130, "If thou shouldst mark iniquities, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

And the evil of sin, seeing the evil of sin is manifest most clearly in the cross itself. We need to glory in the cross. We need to think about the cross. We need to meditate upon the cross. There we see both love of God, and the holiness of God. How evil is sin? Here is the spotless Lamb of God, the eternal Son incarnate, as the Word of God, who has obeyed all things according to God's will. And here is Christ being subjected to this torment, being brought under the punishment and penalty for sin, having the wrath of God poured into his soul, on behalf of his people. And as we meditate upon that and think about the details of all that that entails, it shows us the evil of sin, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else. And it leads us to see that the greatness of sin shows us our great need for a great Savior. Every sin—there are many, many, many, many sins that you are not even aware of in your life, and the Lord has to pay for all of the sins of his people, and for all of his people, from Adam to the end of time. This shows our need for a great Savior. There's only one, and one alone, who can redeem us from the wrath of God, and reconcile us unto him.

But then fourthly, it reinforces the joy of the believer, the joy of deliverance from the power of sin here. God has broken the shackles, he's delivered from the slavery to sin! What a joy this is! And the joy of deliverance from the presence of sin hereafter in heaven! You know, heaven is a glorious place, because sin will be eradicated entirely, and the believer will, with a full-hearted devotion and love for the Lord, in holiness, worship, and adore him. There is joy, both in the deliv-

erance from the power of sin here and now, and the presence of sin hereafter.

Well, in this lecture, we have explored the Nature of Sin. We'll continue to consider what the Bible teaches about the transgression of God's law in the lectures to come. In the next lecture, we will turn our attention back to the beginning, to Adam's first sin, and it's ongoing implications for the human race. We'll seek to deepen our understanding of the Doctrine of Original Sin.

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 6*

# The Doctrine of Original Sin

Our understanding of man's natural condition has far-reaching implications. For example, if a person believes that men are born innocent, or born as a blank slate, or that people, at root, are really good people, then it will affect how they view the problems of humanity, and the solutions that they propose. Some think that, for example, education is the answer to the problems of mankind. If you just provide people with enough information, or the right information, then all will be well. We could cite other examples of the same kind of thing. But the Bible gives us a very different perspective. It reveals the truth that the fallen state of mankind shows us that people are sinners, and the only solution for their desperate condition can be found in the gospel, and God's salvation from sin. To make this even clearer, let's begin with a thought-provoking question. It may sound tricky at first, but think carefully about the answer. So here's the question: Are we sinners because we sin, or do we sin because we're sinners? Are we sinners because we sin? Or do we sin because we're sinners? Well, as you reflect on this question, you can discern that the question has to do with the order of things. Do we first sin, and thereby become sinners, or are we first sinners, and therefore sin, as a consequence of that sinful nature? Well, the Biblical Doctrine of Original Sin teaches us that it is the latter, that we are born with a sinful nature, and our actual sins—the sins we commit—flow from that sinful nature.

The series of lectures in this third module on Systematic Theology is devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Man. The purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about man, both before and after the fall—the entrance of sin into the world. In this lecture, we will explore the Doctrine of Original Sin, and, as has been our pattern over the course of these lectures, we'll begin, first of all, by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture, in order to open up our consideration of the Doctrine of Original Sin.

One of the key texts is Romans 5, verses 12 to 19. We won't read the whole passage here, but it opens in verse 12, with these words: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Paul then goes on to explain what is meant by the words, "all have sinned." He does so by drawing a contrast between Adam and Christ, and the connection between Adam and his posterity—all mankind—on one side, and Christ and his people—the elect—on the other side. What we learn is that there is a union between Adam and his posterity. Adam serves as a representative of the human race. Verse 12 says all sinned, and the verses that follow explain that this is an assertion that *in Adam* all sinned. In other words, it is not merely a reference to all people sinning in their lives at some point. Rather, it is affirming that all men were included in Adam's first sin. Notice how this is reinforced in the words that follow, if you have your Bible. In verse 14, we have Paul affirming that death reigned

in those who had not sinned like Adam. Death reigned because of the one sin of Adam himself, not the actual sins of his posterity. In verse 15, we learn that by the trespass of the one, the many died. In verse 16, we see that the judgment was from one unto condemnation. In verse 17, by the trespass of the one, Adam, death reigned through the one. In verse 18, we see that through one trespass, judgment came upon all men unto condemnation. And then in verse 19, through the disobedience of the one man, Adam, the many were constituted sinners. Well, we'll expound the implications of this in what follows in this lecture. But we see here that the Bible teaches that the first sin of the first man, Adam, had direct implications on the whole human race. Adam was not merely acting for himself, but rather, was acting as a representative of all his posterity. Well, this sets before us the Doctrine of Original Sin.

And so, secondly, let's consider some of the details regarding original sin. In Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 6, paragraph 3, we read: "They"—that is, our first parents—"being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin"—the first sin—"was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation." So how do we define original sin then? Well, it is the sin and corruption that has come to all men descending by ordinary generation from Adam. Augustine used this language of original sin to include the following concepts. First, we are all one in the state of sin. Secondly, it is derived from Adam's first sin. And then, thirdly, this sinful nature is the source of all of our actual sins. Now, remember what we learned in a previous lecture about guilt. When we say "guilt," we're referring to the fact, not to a subjective feeling—a person feels guilty or doesn't feel guilty—but an objective reality—the declaration that someone has broken God's law. They are found guilty of being a transgressor—a violator of God's law.

So the question then is this: How is the guilt of Adam's first sin passed on to his posterity? And in order to understand the relationship between Adam, as a representative of the human race, and all of his posterity that flow from him, we need to understand the Biblical concept of imputation—this is very important. Imputation is a legal term, and it means, "to attribute to," or, "to credit to one's account," or, "to reckon." Now, imputation, this legal term, is not only important for understanding original sin, it is essential for understanding the gospel, because the Bible teaches that there are three imputations. First of all, the one we're concerned with in this lecture—the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity. So, Adam's sin being credited to the account of his posterity. The second is, the imputation of the elect's sin to Christ. So the sins of God's elect people are imputed to Christ—they're credited to his account. They're reckoned to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he then, as the sin-bearer, atones for their sin. And then, thirdly, you have Christ's righteousness imputed to the elect, and received by faith alone. So here, the law obedience, the perfect law-keeping of the Lord Jesus Christ is credited to the account of his elect people. They receive that by faith; they are justified by faith; they are declared righteous in the sight of God, and have access and acceptance before him as a result. So there are these three imputations. So it's important that we understand this idea. The word itself, for example, the word for imputation is used several times in Romans 4, when explaining the gospel. And you'll see the concept, for example, in places like 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21. Where it's speaking of Christ, it says, "For he who knew no sin," became sin, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." It's talking about sin being imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness being imputed to the believer. Well, we noted that imputation is a legal term, and you can see how this is so fundamental to understanding Biblical doctrine. The relationship of our sin to Christ, as the sin-bearer; the relationship of Christ's righteousness to the elect. Well, the same applies to Adam and his posterity. Adam was serving as a representative of the human race,

and his sin and the guilt of his first sin, in eating the forbidden fruit, is credited to the account, or imputed to all of his posterity. So that we are counted guilty with Adam. Just as Adam was guilty in his sin, we are counted guilty with Adam. So that helps us—this background of understanding the idea of imputation helps us in answering the question, how exactly does the guilt of Adam’s sin get transferred to those of the human race.

Well, another thing, thirdly, under this, is we see that Adam served as a representative then, which speaks of his headship over the human race. So there is a union with Adam, a union between all of his posterity—everyone who’s ever been born into this world—with Adam. This is why 1 Corinthians 15, verse 22 says, “For as *in* Adam all die, even so *in* Christ shall all be made alive,” speaking about union with Adam, “for as *in* Adam,” and it’s contrasted with the believers’ union with Christ, “even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Paul goes on to expound this later on in that same chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, verses 45 to 49. And so, Adam served as a legal head, as our representative. The effects of the curse, including death, for example, fall upon those who have not yet sinned themselves, by the imputation of the one trespass of the one man, Adam, to his posterity.

We can also speak of Adam, not only as a legal head, but as a natural head as well. He’s the first man, and through Adam and Eve, you have all of the descendents of every race, and tribe, and tongue, and people throughout the whole world. And our physically descending from Adam accounts for our inheriting a corrupt nature. So on the one hand, we’re talking about imputation of guilt of Adam’s sin; we also have those who descend from Adam inheriting a corrupt nature from him as well. And so, when you’re thinking about this union, this union between Adam and his seed, or posterity, the nature of that union is not just his representation as the source of all mankind. So there are some who think, well, you’re in the loins of Adam, and that explains the imputation of guilt, that you’re in the loins of Adam. No, that’s not what’s being spoken of. Nor it is his representation by every individual really being in Adam. In other words, we are all a portion of the human race contained in Adam. That doesn’t get to the point that Paul’s making either. Rather, the correct view of the nature of this union is that he served as a representative head. What Adam did was for himself, and for all of his posterity.

Well, we can go a step further, and we can ask about the nature of imputation itself. We’ve noted that it’s a legal term; we’ve showed how it relates to the relationship of the elect in Christ, and so on. But we can go a little deeper with regards to our understanding of the nature of this imputation. Because the question is, is that imputation mediate, or is it immediate? So, what do we mean by those words? Well, is imputation mediate—in other words, this is speaking of hereditary depravity. And those who would say that the imputation is mediate—“mediate” means, through the means of something, that it comes through other means; in other words, hereditary depravity is the vehicle through which Adam’s guilt is imputed to us. The corrupt nature that we have derived is the ground of our condemnation, not really Adam’s sin itself. And this would be incorrect. This doesn’t do justice to what we find in Romans, chapter 5, verses 12 to 19, which is the fullest passage on the Doctrine of Original Sin. No, rather, we should view the imputation of Adam’s sin as immediate—so, not passing down to posterity through some other means. The guilt of Adam’s first sin was immediately imputed by virtue of his posterity’s union with him—it’s the point of Romans 5. It’s teaching us that the sin of Adam and the death that comes as a result of that guilt to all of his posterity is something immediate. And in that passage, the same is true with regards to judgment as well—the judgment that comes as a result of it.

So in thinking about this, just maybe by way of summary, the imputation of the guilt of Adam’s sin is important for us to understand the Bible. If his guilt is imputed to his posterity, well then,

therefore the penalty and punishment of that guilt, the judgment and death also come to all of his posterity. This explains why children, for example—this is very sad—but children can die within their mother’s womb. Well, how can they die? Because death is the consequence of sin. And the point is, the reason their able to die is because, in union with Adam, they have imputed to them the guilt of sin, and therefore they are subject to death.

We also, in addition, as fallen mankind, inherit a corrupt nature, as those who descended from Adam. So you have guilt, and then you have this corrupt nature; and our actual transgressions, in other words, the sins that we commit ourselves proceed from that original corruption. Listen to how the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 6, paragraph 4, puts it. It says, “From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.” So, going back to that question we asked at the beginning, you can see that we sin because we’re sinners. We begin with a sinful nature, and our actual sins proceed out of that sinful corruption.

Thirdly, we need to think about this doctrine polemically, and consider some of the errors that are related to original sin. There have been those who have attacked this doctrine from the very beginning of the church. I had mentioned Augustine, a fourth-century theologian, earlier in the lecture, and there was a great dispute between him and another man named Pelagius. And Pelagianism, the system of thought that he taught, included the idea that all men are born like Adam, in a state of innocence, and that they learn to sin through bad examples. Well, you can see immediately, this flies in the face of what the Scripture teaches. Augustine confronted this. He refuted this from the Scriptures, using some of the passages, and many others that we have referred to. This notion of being born in a state of innocence, as a blank slate, is something utterly opposed to the Bible. David, for example, in that song of repentance that we sing, in Psalm 51, says that in sin did his mother conceive him. So, he’s recognizing that from the inception of his existence, that he was sinful, that he had a sinful nature. So we need to beware of that old heresy of Pelagianism raising its ugly head again from generation to generation.

Secondly, there are those who hear the Doctrine of Original Sin, and their reaction is, “That’s not fair!” People object, “This doesn’t seem right. We are blamed for what Adam did. We’re guilty because of what Adam did, as our representative.” And you can appreciate the objection. You can see what a person might be thinking, and why they would feel the way that they feel. But we have to be very careful here, because if we were to reject the Doctrine of Original Sin on this ground—that it is unfair, you’re disposing of something else that’s very important. This objection cuts two ways, because, for example, take what we learned about the doctrine of imputation. If you don’t like the idea that Adam’s guilt is imputed to his people, then you have to reject, as well, all that Christ has done. Right? It’s not fair then, on those terms, that the sins of God’s people are credited to the account of Christ, and he has to pay the penalty and punishment for them. It’s not fair that Christ’s perfect record of righteousness is imputed to his people by faith, and they’re justified and made acceptable before God. You see my point. You have to be very careful here. We can’t reject this one side, and think, well, somehow I’m going to take the benefits of the other side, no, these things have to be held together. The fact is that, if God gave us what is fair, we would be doomed. But thankfully, he is just and merciful. He is just and the Justifier of the ungodly through the work of Christ, and he extends mercy where it is unwarranted from our side—undeserved. The Lord bestows mercy upon us. We have to believe what the Scriptures teach, and that means not only the good news about what Christ has done, but the bad news about our union with Adam as well.

The third objection has to do with what we considered in a previous course on the Doctrine of

Decrees. You know, why did God allow Adam to sin? The Westminster Confession takes this up in that same chapter, chapter 6, paragraph 1, it says: “Our first parents, being seduced by the subtilty and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.” We are finite creatures who see and know so little. God is the infinite God of glory. And in that infinite wisdom and power and goodness, God has decreed that the fall would happen, that Adam’s first sin would happen, in order that he might, in his purposes, use it for his own glory, for magnifying the glory of his own great name. And we need to humble ourselves before the Lord, and to put our hands over our mouth, as it were, and to say, “Let God be God, and all glory be to him for his wise disposal.”

Fourthly, we can now draw a few brief practical applications for ourselves. First of all, we cannot downplay the desperation of man’s condition. So, as Christians, we need to resist vehemently all of the pagan notions of man’s inherent goodness and moral purity. People want to think that people are generally good; if we just gave them more information and educated them, we can turn the world into a wonderful place. The Christian rejects this outright. And we have to acknowledge there is nothing that can contend with what the Bible says about how desperate man is in his fallen condition and his inherent sinfulness. This is serious, and a serious truth that has to be contended for.

We also need to see that sin is the root problem of all problems. So people will talk about civil unrest, and wars, and domestic violence, and people have personal problems and struggles, and there’s conflict in families, and in communities, and so on, and so forth. It doesn’t matter what the problem is. I mean, you can look at all the diversity of problems that arise within human experience. They can all be traced back to the root problem of sin itself. Well, this gives the Christian a measure of wisdom, in being able to see things rightly, as God sees them. The Christian isn’t going to be so easily duped into some of the solutions that the world tries to give, to personal problems, family problems, problems between nations, and so on. The Christian recognizes that there is something missing, that it has to be brought down to the root problem, that in fact, problems with nations are best solved by sending missionaries, and that missionaries going and preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and people being brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and given a new heart, and so on, and then the Spirit coming to indwell them, and enabling them to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Christ’s likeness, that these are the means through which problems are addressed.

And that, of course, highlights, lastly, the inescapable necessity of Christ’s redeeming work that is proclaimed in the gospel. The background of being in Adam accentuates the glory of being in Christ. It shows how desperate we are to be, we must be united by faith, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is in union with him that all of the other benefits and blessings of salvation and grace flow to us. They flow from Christ, who is our Head, to us, who, united to him, are members of his body. He has all the preeminence, because from him, we receive all of the benefits and blessings. And so this accentuates for us the wonder of Christ’s redeeming work which is proclaimed in the gospel.

Well, in this lecture, we have explored the Doctrine of Original Sin, and we’ve learned that the problem of the whole human race must be traced back to Adam and his first sin. In the next lecture, we will turn our attention from the past, the beginning of time, to the present. And we will explore more fully man’s fallen nature in an exposition of the Doctrine of Total Depravity.



# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 7*

# The Doctrine of Total Depravity

The word “gospel” means, good news. But how exactly good is the news of the gospel? To understand the amazing message of salvation, you have to first know something about why sinners need salvation. In other words, you need to know the bad news before you can value the good news. Think, for example, of going to the doctor for a regular check up, and the doctor tells you about a new treatment plan that they have developed that has wonderful results in saving people’s lives. You may think, Well that’s interesting. But it will seem rather irrelevant to you. But if you go to the doctor, and they run a battery of tests, and he comes back to you and says, “I’m terribly sorry, but you have a deadly condition, and you’re in serious trouble. However, we have developed a new protocol, and there’s a treatment plan that has been extremely successful, and we have good results in saving people’s lives.” Well, then you would rejoice, and you would think, How wonderful this is—this development is, because you would see the value for yourself. The bad news that the doctor brings actually reinforces the good news that follows. And we could give other illustrations of the same kind of thing. If you’re swimming in the ocean, and all is well, and someone jumps in tries to save you, you might think that it is a bit of a nuisance. But if you’re drowning, and someone jumps in and saves you and rescues you, and actually saves your life, then you’re going to be extremely grateful for it. And so it is with the natural man. There has to be some acquaintance with the bad news to appreciate the good news of the gospel. But the problem with sinful men is that they do not realize that the bad news regarding their spiritual condition is far worse than they think, and the good news of God’s grace is far better than they think. These two things together. We need to see ourselves as God sees us, and as he describes us in the Bible. Think of a white sheet. If you see it from a distance, and it’s standing on the side of a hill with green pasture, you might look at it and think, Wow, that’s a very white sheet. But if snow falls onto that pasture, and now you’re looking at the sheet against the backdrop of a blanket of snow, it might look rather dirty, it might look not white at all—it might look rather brown or something else. That whiteness exposes the dirtiness of the sheet. Well, the Scriptures teach us that sin affects and disables the whole of the natural man.

This series of lectures in this third module on Systematic Theology is devoted to the Doctrine of Man—what we call Anthropology. And the purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about man. And we’ve been looking at that, both man before the fall, as well as man after the fall, and seeking to understand what we’re to make of who man is. Well, in this lecture, we’ll explore the Doctrine of Total Depravity.

And we’ll begin, first of all, as is our pattern, by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the Doctrine of Total Depravity. And I would direct your attention to

Genesis, chapter 6. You'll remember the context for this—it's the days of Noah prior to the flood, and there has been a lot of change that has unfolded over the intervening years since the time of Adam, and there's been a spiritual degradation. Men have been left to themselves to pursue their own natural lusts and pursuit of pleasure, and wickedness has begun to abound. That's the context for why God comes to Noah, who is a preacher of righteousness, and tells him to prepare an ark, because the Lord is going to come and destroy the world with all of its wickedness. It's in that context that we come to Genesis, chapter 6, verse 5, and there we read these words: "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Well, there is a great deal that is packed into those few words. Let's think about some of what this entails.

First of all, we see something about the intensity of sin. "The wickedness of man was great"—so notice that word "great." It was substantial—it was something that was extensive—the nature of the intensity of man's sin. But then, secondly, we also see the totality of sin. He says that his wickedness was great, and he speaks of "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart"—every imagination. So it's not just a little sin here, and a little sin there, or hit and miss. But rather, it is influencing everything that is in him—every thought is tainted with sin. Thirdly, we see the inwardness of sin, because it says the "imagination of the thoughts of his heart." So it's not just the outward actions, you know, he's doing bad things, or saying bad things, but the very thoughts of his heart are full of sin. Fourthly, you'll notice that sin is exclusive. He says that it is "only evil." So it's not partially evil, but completely evil. All of his thoughts are tainted with sin, with evil. You also see that, fifthly, sin is habitual. "The imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Notice that word "continually." This was a habitual description of the character of man, the habits of man. And then, sixthly, we see that sin is innate. It speaks about "the wickedness of man," speaking about something not that he's conditioned by, but something that is inborn within him. It's wickedness that characterizes his person.

Well, in thinking about Genesis 6, verse 5, we see that the bad news is really bad for every unconverted sinner. Left unchecked, this rises as a great provocation of the Lord's wrath, not only resulting in temporal judgments—as was the case in the day of Noah in the sending of the flood, but eternal punishment in hell. And this accentuates that sinners desperately need a Savior. The picture of the ark is a picture of Christ, and of people being taken into the ark, and delivered from the wrath of God. So Genesis 6, verse 5 opens up for us the Doctrine of Total Depravity.

But secondly, let's consider some of the doctrinal details regarding total depravity. And I would direct your attention, first of all, to the Westminster Confession of Faith. In chapter 9, paragraph 3, it says this: "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." Well, that describes the Doctrine of Total Depravity.

Well, how do we define the words "total depravity"? And that word "total" can be a little confusing, so let's see if we can secure some clarity. "Total" does not mean that man is as wicked as he possibly could be—so it does not mean that. Total means that every aspect of man's nature is impacted by sin—the totality of his person. And so, it's descriptive of something that is horizontal, rather than vertical. It affects every aspect of his person. It's not saying that he is as wicked as he possibly could be, as if it wasn't possible for him to be more wicked. Man's corruption is extensive, but not necessarily intensive. The unbeliever is totally, not utterly, depraved. So that should help us in understanding what we mean by total depravity.

The Bible makes clear that every part of man—every faculty of man—is affected by sin. Think with me about what the Scripture says. First of all, with regards to his mind and his understanding—that is depraved, that is affected by sin. Ephesians 4, verses 17 and 18, say, “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk”—okay, Paul, how do these other Gentiles walk? How do the unconverted walk? He says, “in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” So you can see that sin and the depravity of man influences his mind and his understanding.

Secondly, it also influences what they love—what men are attracted to, what excites them, the things that they desire. In 1 John 2, verses 15 and 16, we’re told, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Love of the world, love of the Father are opposites. It goes on, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” And so, the natural man loves what is sinful—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and so on.

It also influences—his depravity influences his conscience. His conscience is that vice-regent, if you will, within the soul that testifies against him. We learned about that in a previous lecture. In Titus 1, verse 15, we’re told, “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.” Depravity results in a defiled conscience.

Next, we see that man’s will is also depraved—so his volition—what he does, and how he uses his will, the things that he pursues, and so on. Jesus says, in John 8, verses 43 and 44, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” So here’s the will—what men will do. They will do the lusts of their father, the devil. The will is also depraved.

Well, next, this depravity, which influences all of the various faculties of man results in the total inability of the natural man to do what is pleasing to the Lord. So total depravity needs to be associated with his total inability to do what pleases the Lord. We saw reference to this in a previous lecture on the Freedom of the Will. You’ll remember, in Romans 3, there are none that are righteous, no not one; there are none that seek after God, there are none that do good.

The Scripture provides some graphic descriptions of this total inability. So let’s think about man’s total inability. How is it described in the Bible? First of all, man is described as a slave to sin. So it’s not as if he can take sin and, perhaps, leave sin, that he can decide at times to serve sin, and otherwise. No, he’s a slave—he’s captive, he’s under the power of sin, he’s controlled by sin. Again, John, chapter 8, verse 34, “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin,” or, the slave of sin. So they’re in slavery to sin.

Secondly, in terms of his inability, man is described as being spiritually dead. So man is not just sick, not just weak, not just crippled—he’s actually spiritually dead. Ephesians 2, verse 1, speaking of a Christian, he says, “And you hath he quickened, who were”—now he’s referred to before they were converted—“who were dead in trespasses and sins.” So they’re spiritually dead. They may have physical life—they can see, and hear, and walk, and run, and eat, and so on, but their soul is dead to the things of God—they can’t see the truth, or hear the truth, or respond in love to the truth, or do the truth. The same thing is reinforced in that same chapter, Ephesians 2, verse 5. So they’re spiritually dead.

The third characteristic of man’s inability is that he is blind. Ephesians 4, verse 18: “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in

them.” It’s not just that his sight is dim, needing something equivalent to glasses, like I’m wearing, but rather, he cannot see at all. He can’t see the truth at all, he’s unable to see what is spiritually pleasing to the Lord. And so, you’re beginning to get a picture here of man’s inability. What can dead men do? They can’t do anything. What can blind men see? They can’t see anything.

Well, fourthly, that brings us to the fact that man’s total inability is described in terms of him being powerless. He’s powerless, he has no strength—no strength to do what he ought to do. Jesus says, in John 6, verse 44, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” You’ll see something similar in 1 Corinthians 4, verse 7, what do we have that we haven’t received; or John 15, verse 5, that without Christ, we can do nothing. Man is powerless to do what is pleasing to the Lord.

Next, we also see his inability, in terms of ignorance—his ignorance of the truth. First Corinthians 2, verse 14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” He can’t know them; he’s ignorant of them.

And so, all of this is descriptive of man’s inability, which is part of his total depravity. Natural man is not free, he is not just sick, he’s not dim-sighted, he’s not just weak, he’s not somewhat knowledgeable. No, he’s the opposite of all of those things. And this total depravity and total inability is as universal as sin itself, which means every individual is totally depraved—everyone born into this world, and apart from the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Go back and consult again, Romans 3, verse 10 and following. So this helps us kind of flesh out our understanding of the doctrinal truths regarding total depravity.

But then, thirdly, we should consider this polemically—we have to consider some of the errors that are related to Total Depravity. And the first thing that is sometimes raised is this: people will hear this doctrine, and they’ll say, “Well, not all men appear equally wicked.” We’re saying that all men are totally depraved, but they don’t appear equally wicked. There are some notorious criminals, and there are other people that are rather quiet and do what seems like insignificant acts of wickedness, and so on. Well, it can be helpful here if we distinguish theologically between the sinfulness of sin, and the degrees of the heinousness of sin. So the sinfulness of sin—this is something speaking about the nature of sin itself, and it is the same with every sin and every person. But that is different from describing the degrees of heinousness of sin. Some sins are more heinous, some sins are less heinous. So take any one of the Ten Commandments—take the sixth commandment, for example. And we know that Jesus says in Matthew 5, that if you hate your brother, if you speak evil against them, you are guilty of murdering them in your heart. But to think something bitter or angry about a person is less heinous than actually expressing it—saying it to them. And saying it to them is less heinous than, perhaps, physically acting out and maybe striking them. But striking them would be even less heinous than actually murdering them. So in each of these cases, the sinfulness of sin is the same, they’re equally sinful before the Lord, but the degrees of heinousness are different. And so, when people say, “Well not all men appear equally wicked,” they may be saying, some show greater heinousness in the sins that they’re committing, but that doesn’t affect the Doctrine of Total Depravity, which is talking about man’s sin and inability before the Lord. They’re all equally in that condition of sinful depravity at root, and at the bottom.

Secondly, another objection that is raised is this: What about the so-called good works in sinful men. A person helps an old lady cross the street, or they give food to somebody who’s hungry, or they say a nice word to someone by way of encouragement. “You’d say, Well, see, there’s some good—there’s some good in them.” Well, that’s what theologians sometimes call “civic good.”

And civic good appears good, but it is just bridling perversity without removing it from the heart. Even these actions of civic good are counted as sin, when viewed in relationship to God. So the unconverted person who is engaging in what we'd say is civic good, is still considered sinful when viewed in the relationship to God, because it is done with impure motives, and not for God's glory. So they may help an old lady cross the street, but it may be because it makes them feel better, or it gives them a sense of their own goodness before other people, or they may have a whole wide array of different motives. But for the unbeliever, they're not doing it for God's glory, and therefore, even their civic good, those actions, are still sinful. This is why the prophet Isaiah can say, "Your righteousnesses are as filthy rags"—that before God, in terms of acceptance before him, in terms of access to him, and in terms of reconciliation to the Lord, all of these so-called good deeds are as filthy rags before the Lord.

Thirdly, people will object, "If it is true that man has a total inability, if he is not able to do what is good, then he should not be responsible for doing good either. If he's not able, then he's not responsible." This is a common objection. But the Bible teaches that he remains responsible. Why? Think back to our previous lectures. Man always chooses what he wants. He always chooses what he wants, but he only wants what is ultimately displeasing to God. His inability never removes his responsibility before the Lord. He's still culpable for what he does, before the Lord.

Well, fourthly, we can now draw some practical application for ourselves. And first of all, it's helpful here to see why it is important that ministers of the gospel preach both law and gospel. We have to preach both law and gospel. There is a place within the design of God in his Word for preaching in a way that produces what we call a "law-work," exposing people to the reality of their sin. Remember, they naturally do not realize that the bad news is as bad as it really is, and can't therefore appreciate how good the good news is. Paul says this in Romans 3, verses 19 and 20, "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. 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." So, in preaching the law of God, we are showing people the bad news. We're bringing them to see—with the blessing and ministry of the Holy Spirit—we're bringing them to see and to have a knowledge of their own sin, of their need, of their depravity, of their lostness before the Lord. And so, it would be a fault in ministers, if they only preached the good news without telling the sinner the bad news that makes the good news relevant. And this is really working in connection with how the Spirit works. The Spirit comes to convict the world of sin and of righteousness and judgment to come. And then the Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to a person. The Spirit gives them faith to receive Christ as he is offered in the gospel, and so on. So the need for both preaching law and gospel.

Secondly, we see the inescapable necessity of the sovereign grace of God, and the Holy Spirit's ministry. If you go back to that passage in Ephesians 2, in those first three verses, it opens up, and it says the natural man is "dead" in sin. And then it goes on to say that natural men are "children of disobedience"—those who are transgressing God's Word and his law. And then it goes on to say, in verse 3, that they are "children of wrath." So they're dead, and they're disobedient, and they're damned. Then it goes on, in verses 4 and 5, and it says, "But God"—"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." We see the inescapable necessity of the sovereign grace of God. The ministry of the Holy Spirit here accentuates the wonder and beauty and glory of the gospel. It shows us that it is truly amazing grace! The Holy Spirit's work to come to those who

are lost in themselves, and to bring them by his power to the Lord Jesus Christ—God drawing sinners who could never run themselves to God. It shows how amazing his grace is—his grace—he comes and intervenes! He comes and breaks into the world of the sinner. And God draws them—and he sends his Spirit to work in them, and by his grace, he redeems them. And we're left saying, "This is amazing!"—the glory of the good news of the gospel.

Thirdly, we see that the way up is the way down. So the bad news comes before the good news. If we were only teaching the bad news all the time, that would be a tragedy. And if we were only telling people, who had no sense of their need, of the good news, that would be mistaken as well. But these two have to be held together. And this puts the emphasis, as we've noted, on God's amazing grace. Because now, when we're brought to see the reality of our true condition as totally depraved before the Lord, and we're brought to see the wonderful provision in Christ's redeeming work, his atonement upon the cross, his sacrifice for sin, the cleansing of his blood, his righteousness credited to the account of those who believe upon him, and so on, this results in profound joy; it results in profound comfort and blessing. The Christian is able to wake up every morning, and whatever other burdens and difficulties they're facing, they're able to say, "Every day that is a day outside of hell is a wonderful day." To wake up and to realize that we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and that we've been brought into the glorious riches of his grace gives the Christian a sustained joy, and a comfort that cannot be taken away from them. And so this is wonderful.

Fourthly, and most importantly, this doctrine, the Doctrine of Total Depravity—total inability, requires that all the glory and honor go to God, and not to man. Man can't take credit. Man can't point to himself. In the Bible, and in these Biblical doctrines, God is lift up high in all of his glory, and man is put down into the dust. And we see that all grace comes from God, and therefore, all of the glory must go to God. Man can't take credit—the believer cannot take credit for anything in himself. There is nothing that he has not received by way of grace and goodness. All of the glory goes to God. You can see how this doctrine magnifies the glory of God, and it exalts him in all of his beauty, and in all of his power, and it teaches the believer to worship him, and to adore him.

Well, in this lecture, we have explored the Doctrine of Total Depravity. Really, over the last several lectures, we've considered the impact of the fall of mankind, and what the Bible teaches about man in his sinful condition. Beginning in the next lecture, we will turn our attention to the Doctrine of the Covenant, and we will first explore God's initial covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden—what we call, the Covenant of Works.

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 8*

# The Doctrine of the Covenant of Works

God created mankind after his own image, and made man to have a personal relationship with himself. The Lord determined to manifest his presence to man, and to open the possibility of holding fellowship and communion with him. We see this from the very beginning, in the Garden of Eden before the fall. But the Lord was not obligated to do this. He voluntarily condescended to do it, for the purpose of his own glory. So one question is, how did he do it? In other words, in what way did God determine to relate to man? The Bible teaches that God chose to relate to man by way of covenant. In the last few lectures, we have been considering man as a sinner, and the consequences that sin has on man. We looked at his will—Freedom of the Will, The Nature of Sin, Original Sin, Total Depravity, and so on. But now, we need to add to all of that, by establishing from scripture, the covenantal context in which sin came into the world.

This series of lectures in this third module on Systematic Theology is devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Man. The purpose has been to explore what the Bible teaches about man, before and after the fall. In this lecture, we will begin exploring the Doctrine of the Covenant, beginning with the Covenant of Works. So, we'll first of all, begin by briefly looking at a passage of scripture to open up our consideration of the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works.

If you'll turn with me back to the beginning of the Bible, where we find Adam, placed by God in the Garden of Eden, prior to the fall into sin. In Genesis 2, verses 16 and 17, we read, "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 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." Well, we can note several things from these words. Notice the language, "And the LORD God commanded the man." So here we see God condescending to relate to man in a way that is distinct from all of the other creatures. He's entering into a relationship with Adam. You'll also note that he gives him a command—he commanded him something. So the relationship was governed by stipulations—by requirements. Adam was required to live on God's terms. He could eat of all that God had made, but he was forbidden from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You'll also see there God's goodness, because he does say, "of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." So it's not as if God is being overly restrictive or harsh to Adam. Quite to the contrary, he's giving him an abundance and providing, out of his goodness, all of this bounty for him to enjoy. He merely restricts him to not eating from one tree. And you'll see that specific demand that is stipulated by God, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat." So that was the singular, the one tree from which he could not eat. And then, in addition to this, there is the warning that God gives, the warning of a curse for disobedience. He says, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." So along

with the stipulation, came the potential curse for disobeying it. Now there's more to be seen in this passage, which we will unpack in just a moment. But this provides a cursory overview of some of the main points, and it establishes the framework for our thinking. It provides the background for what theologians call, the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works.

Let me say from the beginning, that understanding and affirming this doctrine, the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works, is very important—it's very important because it provides the Biblical basis for our understanding of many other doctrines that follow. Wilhelmus à Brakel was a seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian, and he wrote these words—he said, "Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here, or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will readily deny that Christ, by his active obedience, has merited a right to eternal life for the elect." He goes on, "Whoever denies the covenant of works must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well." So you see à Brakel reinforcing the point that I have made here at the beginning on the importance of this doctrine.

So, secondly, let's consider some of the doctrinal details regarding the Covenant of Works. In Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 7, paragraph 1, we read these words: "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant." And so we see there that, as Creator, God made, and therefore, owns all things. And all creatures are responsible to pay obedience to him, as those that derive their existence from him. But God's relationship to man goes beyond that creaturely obligation. Given the great distance between God and man, God condescended to relate to man by way of covenant, thereby entering into an engagement that would open the way for man to have God as their blessedness and reward.

Well, the covenant theme is a weighty Biblical doctrine, one that is woven through the whole of the scriptures. So the question comes, What is a covenant? And at the most basic level, a covenant is a solemn engagement, or an agreement, a commitment between two parties. A covenant usually includes stipulations and conditions, blessings and curses, and also signs and seals to confirm that covenant. This concept of covenant, as I said, becomes a dominant theme throughout the rest of the Bible.

Well that brings us then to the Covenant of Works, because God's first covenant with man is what we call the Covenant of Works. And I would direct your attention again back to the Westminster Confession of Faith, this time, chapter 7, paragraph 2. It says, "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." You will notice that the word "covenant" is not used in Genesis 2, so if you go back and read through that chapter, you'll look for a long time, and discover that the word isn't actually there. But as we will see, all the elements of a covenant are present. And later on in the Bible, it is referred to as a covenant. In Hosea 6, verse 7, that passage says, "But they like men"—and here, the word "men" in the original Hebrew word is the word "adam," or Adam—"But they like [Adam] have transgressed the covenant, there have they dealt treacherously against me." And so, there's a reference, a passing reference to this covenantal arrangement in the Garden. And you'll see something similar to this kind of thing in God's covenant with David. We read about that in 2 Samuel 7, but 2 Samuel 7 does not use the word "covenant" in that chapter. However, it does use the word "covenant" later, in chapter 23. So the covenant is



formed, in 2 Samuel 7, and it's referred to later, in chapter 23, as a covenant. So it's similar with regards to the Covenant of Works. As I said, we'll note that all of the elements of a covenant are certainly, clearly present. So this was a unique covenant made with Adam, who also served as a representative of the human race before the fall. So he was a public person, if you will—he was representing his seed. In the New Testament, we read, in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 21 and 22, “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” So the covenant is with Adam, and through Adam, as a representative, with his posterity.

Next, we see that God provided stipulations and conditions in this Covenant of Works. God required of Adam perfect personal obedience. Specifically, he commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as we saw in Genesis 2, verse 17. But this Covenant of Works also included blessings and curses. And that's evident, when you're reading chapter 2, that God threatened Adam with the curse of death if he did eat of the forbidden fruit. So if Adam disobeyed the stipulations of the covenant, he would reap the consequences of this curse. And this, of course, is exactly what happened. He ate of the forbidden fruit and reaped the curse as a consequence. The curse was the threat of death, and that threat of death was threefold. It was spiritual death—his soul died—he's now dead in trespasses and sin, as are all of his posterity. It results in eventual physical death, so the presence of death in this world at large, and with man specifically, as a consequence of that first sin. And then there is eternal death—the punishment of hell for eternity. So that's the curse.

But he also held out, God also held out the promised blessing of eternal life to Adam and his posterity, upon condition of his perfect obedience. Now you may be wondering to yourself, Where do we see the promised blessing of this covenant? And that's a good question. When reading Genesis 2, did you notice the reference to two trees? There's not only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of which God forbade Adam to eat. We read in Genesis 2, verse 9, “And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food: the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Did you see that? Notice the reference to the tree of life. God's going to refer to it again in the next chapter, in Genesis 3, verse 22. This tree of life was a sign. It was a visible representation of the promise, and of the promised blessing. The presence of the tree of life held out the prospect, or the promised blessing, of permanent eternal life. And we can verify this by where we see the tree again in scripture. Let me direct your attention to the last place that we see it, the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22. We read, “In the midst of the street of it”—speaking about the new Jerusalem—“and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” That's Revelation 22, verse 2. But furthermore, earlier in the book of Revelation, chapter 2, verse 7, we read this, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Well, we compare scripture with scripture. If Adam, in his state of innocence, had obeyed God during that period of probation, he would have been given permission to eat of the tree of life, and he would have received the blessing of eternal life.

And so we see God condescending, we see God coming to Adam and providing stipulations and conditions in the covenant relationship, we see promises of blessing and threatenings of curses, and so on. Well, we learn from all of this that Adam's sin takes place in the context of a covenant relationship with God. In sinning, Adam broke the covenant. The Covenant of Works was shattered and removed. It is therefore now no longer possible for any sinner to enter that covenant as a way

to eternal life. And this provides the context for what follows, and what we'll be considering in the next lecture regarding the Covenant of Grace.

But we can explore a little further Adam's significance in this covenant, because that is also essential for understanding the rest of theology in the Bible, including the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to understand the work of the last Adam, Christ, you have to comprehend the work of the first Adam. Our relationship to Adam bears important implications for the Christian's relationship to Christ. Remember what we read a moment ago, in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 21 and 22, where it says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Just as Adam represented his seed or posterity, so Christ represents his chosen people. God's salvation after the fall does not bring simply a return to Eden, kind of restarting everything, starting back at the beginning. It provides something far superior to what was seen in the days of Adam. Well, how so? Because Christ not only undoes what Adam did wrong, he also redeems—he does redeem his people from that. So here's Adam, and he has the possibility of obeying and inheriting life, or of disobeying and falling into a position of demerit and reaping the curse. Christ not only redeems his people from that, raising them back up to the position of Adam before the fall, Christ goes on to do what Adam failed to do, in meeting the demands of personal perfect obedience, on behalf of his people, thus raising them to inherit the promise of eternal life. We have the beginnings of preparation for seeing the importance of Christ here, and the provision, for example, of justification by faith in Christ, which we'll consider more fully in a future module on Systematic Theology. But as you can see, the Covenant of Works undergirds many gospel doctrines, including doctrines that pertain to the gospel. The parallel between Adam and Christ is made clear and brought to the fore so that we can put together the pieces that comprise the gospel.

Well, thirdly, we must consider this doctrine polemically, by thinking about some of the errors that are related to the Covenant of Works—the errors that people raise. We've already addressed the objection that the word "covenant" is not used in Genesis 2—so that's one objection. People will say, "Well, it doesn't say 'covenant' in Genesis 2, therefore there isn't a Covenant of Works." And we referred to Hosea 6, verse 7, where there is a passing reference to it. But even more important, we demonstrated that all the elements of a covenant are present. Just as we would not reject the Doctrine of the Trinity because the word "trinity" is not used in the Bible, though it is clearly and absolutely taught, so we should not reject the Covenant of Works because the word "covenant" is not used in the Garden of Eden, knowing that that covenant is actually taught—all of the components are actually present. And without it, we would be at a loss for understanding things about Christ and the gospel.

Secondly, there are those who object by saying, "Well, wait a second, this teaches salvation by works, not grace." And there's several things we can say to this. First of all, God's grace and goodness are not absent in the Garden of Eden. So we noted that God provides an abundant and lavish provision, giving him all of the bounty that he is allowed to eat from. But even in the covenant stipulations themselves, the reward that God promises to Adam, for obeying and not eating from the forbidden fruit, is actually disproportionate to what is deserved. So God is saying, "Don't eat of this tree, and your obedience is going to result in you having eternal life." Well, does that action itself somehow inherently deserve eternal life? No, that's God's goodness in offering that to Adam. So, you can think by way of illustration. You think of a very wealthy man, a man who has enormous financial resources. If he were to come to you, and to say, "Listen, I want to enter into an engagement with you. I'm going to ask you to take my groceries out of my car, and carry them up a flight of stairs, and put them before the front door of my house, and I'm asking you to

do this. If you do it, I'm going to give you ten million dollars." You would kind of shake your head and think, Well, this is ridiculous. But stick with me for just a second here. That's theoretically possible. The man could actually draw up a contract and sign it, and say, "If you take my groceries from the car to the front door, I'll give you ten million dollars." Well, that action of carrying a few groceries to the front door isn't inherently worth ten million. But there's nothing wrong with the rich man saying, "This is what I want to do, and I have the ability to do it, and I've decided to do it, and therefore, I'll pay you ten million dollars to accomplish this." Well, you would say, "Wow, that's incredibly generous, on behalf of the wealthy man." And so, it's not as if God's goodness is absent from the Covenant of Works, but it is true that the idea of merit is present in the Covenant of Works. In fact, it's not only present, it's important that it's present. Remember, Adam is in a state of innocence. This is before the fall. He's not in a state of guilt before God. And the Lord has established this covenant with him as the way in which he's going to relate to him, and it's important for us because of the parallel to Christ. What happens with the Lord Jesus Christ? The Lord Jesus Christ comes and does, as I said earlier, he not only reverses, or undoes, what Adam did wrong, removing our demerit, by atoning for the guilt of sin, in his death on the cross—he does that, and it's important for salvation. But he also does more than that. He merits—Christ merits eternal life through full obedience to God's will. Christ obeys all of the demands of God's law, perfectly and personally, and he does not fail in any degree. There is a record of perfect righteousness, perfect law-keeping, perfect conformity to God's will. And that record of perfect righteousness is imputed, or credited, to the account of all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. So then, in coming to Christ, we not only have the forgiveness of guilt and the pollution of sin, we also have the privilege of being clothed in the righteous garments of Jesus Christ, being deemed acceptable, and given access to God, because of the righteous record of Jesus Christ. And so you see there the parallel with the last Adam, Christ, meriting eternal life through obedience to God's will. Well, that parallel includes what we see with regards to Adam, and yes, it did include this element of merit, of earning something as a result of obedience to God's will in a state of innocency. So we can answer the argument that well, this is somehow imposing a different gospel, a salvation by works and not grace. That's not true, because it's not talking about man after the fall in the context of sin. But it's also not true, because underneath that objection, you would actually undermine Christ's work in the gospel as well.

Thirdly, there are those who would come to the Covenant of Works, and say, "Yes, we believe in it, and what's more, we believe that all men are under the same covenantal arrangement as Adam was—that all men who are born into this world since Adam have the same opportunity to earn life through obedience to God." And this is absolutely not true. This must be rejected entirely, with all of our being. Because, as a consequence of the entrance of sin, the only way to acceptance with God is now through the Covenant of Grace, which is preached in the gospel. And so now there is no way to earn eternal life in ourselves, but rather, we must look away to a surety and a substitute in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the basis and the source through which we receive salvation. And to say anything to the contrary is to deprecate the person and work of Christ, and to reject the gospel as a whole. So there are a few things to consider polemically in reference to this doctrine.

We can now draw some practical applications for ourselves, very briefly. First of all, we ought to have a profound amazement that God would relate to man by covenant at all. As we said at the beginning, it's not as if God was obligated to do this, but it is for his own glory, and out of his own good pleasure that he does voluntarily condescend to enter into covenant with men. And we ought to be amazed that God would relate to us in that capacity, with all of the privileges that come with it.

We also ought to recognize, secondly, that we ought to face the catastrophic consequences of Adam breaking the Covenant of Works. We see it immediately in Genesis chapter 3—there’s this great expulsion from the garden. God drives him out of the garden, which is driving him out of the favorable presence of God, and there’s a barricade that’s blocking the way, so that an angel with the flaming sword of fire prevents his reentry into the garden. Man is cut off from God’s gracious presence. And that’s where mankind, as a whole, is left—Adam and his posterity. That accentuates our great need for salvation.

Thirdly, this, of course, prepares us for the wonder of wonders in the provision of the Covenant of Grace—that God would come back to Adam, and to establish with him, after the fall, a Covenant of Grace, which would be secured through the seed of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And we’ll be considering that in a future lecture.

Lastly, by way of application, the Covenant of Works magnifies the glory of Jesus Christ, as the last Adam. As the representative of his elect people, he accomplishes what Adam failed to do, and it makes, for the believer, the Lord Jesus Christ to be exquisitely beautiful, to see him as incomparable to any other, as the One who is the all-in-all of his people, the One who is the only help and hope of every sinner who comes to him by faith. So it magnifies the glory of Jesus Christ.

Well, in this lecture, we have explored some of the introductory truths about the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works. When Adam broke this covenant, it left him and his posterity under the curse of death. Well, what hope remains? In the next lecture, we’ll turn our attention to the Covenant of Grace, which God introduced after the fall, as a provision of salvation for fallen sinners. This covenant stretches across the pages of the whole Scripture, from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22, and we see it established immediately after the fall, and we can follow that Covenant of Grace all the way into eternity.

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 9*

### **The Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace**

Marriage is a divine institution, instituted by God at the beginning, and practiced all over the world throughout all of human history. At the heart of marriage is a covenant relationship. Malachi 2, verse 14 speaks of “the wife of thy covenant.” A man and a woman enter into a covenantal relationship with the exchange of vows, pledging themselves to each other, and they are thereby united to one another. Two become one, reflected in the consummation of the marriage, as we see in Genesis 2, verse 24. So it begins with a man making a marriage proposal to a woman, asking her to become his wife. It ends with the wife assuming the name of the husband, having a title to all that he is and all that he has. The man belongs to the woman, and the woman belongs to the man. Well, this marriage relationship provides an earthly reflection of a heavenly relationship between God and his people. We see this all through the Old Testament, in the Psalms and prophets, for example. We see it in the New Testament, notably, in places like Ephesians 5, but all the way to the end, in Revelation 21. After the fall, God established a covenant relationship with his people, which we call the covenant of grace.

This series of lectures in this third module on Systematic Theology is devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Man. In the last lecture, we considered the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works established with Adam before the fall, a covenant which Adam broke with tragic consequences. In this lecture, we turn our attention to the covenant of grace. Shorter Catechism, question 20 says, “God, having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.”

So first of all, we’ll begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace. In Genesis 3, verse 15, we read, “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.” In the last lecture on the covenant of works, we saw the human race cast into the deplorable condition of sin, with the consequences of death. The question comes, Does any hope remain? Well, perhaps you’ve seen the sun go down—darkness descends, it becomes darker and darker, and then a lone star appears in the sky, shining against the background of the black sky. This is what happens in Genesis 3:15, where we see the very the very first gospel promise after the fall—a promise fulfilled in Christ. Here is Christ again, in Genesis 3, this time as the Savior. The Puritan, John Owen, noted that Genesis 3:15 provides “in embryo, the whole Doctrine of Salvation for sinners.” It is the first light on the new horizon of God’s grace. We’ve noted that Adam broke the first covenant, the covenant of works. We also noted that, due to the distance between God and man, the Lord must condescend to relate to man by way of a covenant. Now, a

new covenant is necessary, a covenant that addresses the new context of man's fall into an estate of sin. Theologians call this the covenant of grace, through which God provides the salvation of his people. And we find the first seed of this covenant in Genesis 3:15. Notice that God takes the initiative in establishing the covenant on his end. We see God seeking out Adam, then we hear, "I will put enmity," and so on.

For the remainder of the Bible, we will watch this seed take root and grow. God will unfold and expand his revelation of the covenant of grace through the remainder of the history of redemption. Our understanding of the one, that is, the single covenant of grace, will become clearer and clearer through God's covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, until it comes to its fullest expression in the new covenant. There is a dominant continuity traced from Genesis 3:15, all the way through to Revelation 22, revealing God's plan of redemption through his covenant of grace. We only see a glimmer of light here in Genesis 3:15, but God will build on this in all that follows.

We see that Christ will crush the head of the serpent. In the words of Colossians 2:15, "Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." But in the process, Christ's heel would be bruised—that's a reference to his work on the cross. Christ would be made curse—Christ would endure the curse, death, judgment, and wrath of God. Well, this original curse in the Garden provides the background for God's coming salvation of his people through Christ. Galatians 3, verse 13, says that "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." So in Genesis 3:15, the first gospel promise provides us with many things. It also provides with a charter for the church.

Notice three contrasts. You have the serpent and the woman—that ends the alliance that led to man's fall. The serpent and the woman had come together in their move toward rebellion against the Lord. But now that's broken. There's restored fellowship with God that brings enmity with sin and Satan. Secondly, you have represented Christ and Satan. Christ is the woman's seed who would crush the serpent's head, while the serpent would bruise his heel. But thirdly, you see the church, the woman's seed, and the world, Satan's seed. So there's a great division. The rest of Genesis really draws lines of distinction between the woman's faithful seed, and the serpent's rebellious seed, separating the lines of Seth and Cain, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and so on. The seed of the woman would ultimately lead to Christ. This also sets the context of enmity and war between the church under Christ, and the world under Satan's dominion, traced all the way through the history of redemption. Fellowship with God requires separation from fellowship with sin, the world, and the devil.

And so you must understand the theology provided in Genesis 3, to make sense of the rest of the Bible. We see that the promise of Christ, in Genesis 3:15, extends to the triumph of Christ's people over the devil. Paul says, in Romans 16, verse 20, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." All of this introduces us to God's covenant of grace. Understanding this doctrine is very important. Hermann Witsius, a seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian, wrote, "Whoever therefore loves his own salvation, whoever longs to delight himself in the contemplation of the divine perfections, he must come hither, and deeply engage in holy meditations on the covenant of grace."

Well, secondly, let's consider some of the doctrinal details regarding the covenant of grace. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 7, paragraph 3, states the following: "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation

by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.” So there’s a summary. We see that God has established a covenant, and it’s a covenant between God and his people. We see that it includes rich promises of life and salvation. It also requires something—it requires faith to believe and receive those promises offered unto the fallen sons of Adam. That faith is a gracious gift of God supplied by the Holy Spirit to his elect people.

The heart of the covenant of grace, in Biblical terminology, is this: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people.” In fact, that language, and language similar to it, you will find traced through the whole Bible. Indeed, it would be a good exercise for you. Look in Genesis, starting with Noah, but places like Genesis 17, verse 7. You can go through Leviticus and great swaths of the Old Testament, the prophets repeat this language, into the New Testament, places like Hebrews, all the way to Revelation 21, verse 7. The heart of the covenant of grace is that God will be a God to his people, and that they will be his people.

Well, in this lecture, we want to focus our attention on the unfolding scope of the covenant of grace in the history of the Bible. This introduces a very important doctrinal point. The covenant of grace provides continuity to the Scriptures. It begins, as we saw, in Genesis 3:15, and it runs all the way through the Bible, and reaches its culmination in Revelation 21 and 22. So the Biblical covenants—the covenant with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, with David—and the new covenant carry the same message, in ever-increasing clarity, with each successive covenant. Each new covenant brought more light and understanding to God’s redemptive plan. This reached its full climax in the new covenant, which superseded and fulfilled all other administrations of the covenant of grace. This continuity is seen, in that there is one God, there is one people of God, there is one gospel in the covenant of grace, under both Old and New Testaments.

So let’s look at these covenants. Having considered Genesis 3:15, we turn to Noah. After the flood, God blessed Noah, and reasserted his gospel promise in the covenant of grace. You see this in Genesis 9. Now, the pronouncement of God’s blessing on his people becomes an important feature through the Bible, right down to the very last verse of Scripture, Revelation 22, verse 21. As we saw before, God is the One who initiates his covenant. So in Genesis 9:9, it says, “And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.” So God is the author of the covenant with Noah. In the Noahic covenant, you’ll notice the reference to creation, demonstrating the coexistence of creation and redemption. God’s purposes in creation are upheld, in order that redemption may proceed and unfold. Think of other passages in the prophets, like Hosea 2:18. God’s works of creation and providence serve God’s gracious purposes in advancing his plan of redemption in history. We also know that the covenant blessings culminate at the renewal of the ordered existence of creation, in the new heavens and new earth. These fresh covenant promises with Noah are accompanied by multiple sacrifices. You can see that in Genesis 8 and 9. While most of the creatures came into the ark two-by-two, the animals that God designated as “clean” came by sevens. This was a provision for both sacrifice and food. We have the first mention of an altar, in chapter 8, verse 20. The covenant of grace is established with sacrifice and bloodshed, drilling into our minds early the expectation of Christ, who would later say, “This cup is the new testament”—or covenant—“in my blood, which is shed for you”—Luke 22:20. God provides, as well, a perpetual sign of this covenant of grace in the rainbow. Chapter 9, verse 12, “I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.” In addition, we’re introduced to this household principle, so the expansion of the covenant promise to include the family of believers. Noah was a man of faith—he believed God’s Word, as Hebrews 11:7 tells us.

But notice God extends his covenant blessings to Noah, as a believer, and to his children. Again, in chapter 9, verse 9, “And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.” This household principle runs through the Old and New Testaments. When Peter preaches the gospel, in Acts 2, verse 39, he says the same thing, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children.” Inheriting covenant promises in covenant families was not synonymous, however, with true conversion and saving faith. That is, not all receive the promise by faith. The seed of the serpent rose again from within the family of the seed of the woman, through Ham’s rebellion and covenant-breaking, and he was cut off from the assembly of God’s people, as you see at the end of Genesis 9.

Next, we need to go on to the Abrahamic covenant. God’s revelation regarding the salvation of his people in Christ expands more and more with each new step in Biblical history. The Abrahamic covenant provides the groundwork, language, and focus of God’s dealing with his people in the history of redemption. What we find here carries over into the periods that follow. God initiates his covenant, in Genesis 12, verse 1 and following, he explains the saving content, in chapter 15, he confirms it sacramentally with signs and seals, in chapter 17, and concludes it, in chapter 22, verses 15 to 19. We only have time to touch on a few highlights regarding this covenant, which is a part of the covenant of grace. But notice a few things.

We see that the core of the covenant promises is found in the words of chapter 17, verse 7, “I will establish my covenant”—and it goes on a bit later—“to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” So he will be their God, and they will be his people. Imprint those words on your mind—you’re going to see this language over and over throughout the Bible, ultimately, all the way to Revelation 21, verse 3. It’s a covenant also ratified by blood. In Genesis 15, we have an elaborate vision, in which God appeared in smoke and fire, and passed between the pieces of slain animals, taking upon himself solemn oaths and imprecations that he would fulfill his Word. We see again that the gospel promise in the covenant of grace includes the household principle. The promise to Abraham extends to his children, as you saw in verse 7, of chapter 17. This element of the covenant of grace continues here. Since the promise of the covenant is to his children, the sign and seal of the promise—which was circumcision at that time—is also given to his children. In chapter 17, verse 11, “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you,” and he commands that he give it to his sons. In Romans 4, verse 11, Paul calls circumcision a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith. But again, the sign of the promise does not presume regeneration. Both Ishmael and Isaac receive it, though Isaac is the one who has faith. Nevertheless, the command to give the sign to his children was absolutely necessary. Genesis 17, verse 14 makes that clear. This becomes important as we continue to study the Bible.

God’s promise of blessing to Abraham extended through him to the whole world, as God had promised in Genesis 12, verse 3, “and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” This promise would only be fulfilled through the coming Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who is called “the son of Abraham,” in the first verse of the New Testament. In Galatians 3:14, we read, “That the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” In verse 29, “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” And so we see Genesis 3:15 leading us to Abraham’s seed, ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ, and through Christ, to the Gentile believers and children. At you can see, the promise was never intended to be restricted to the Jews, but extended to all those with sound and saving faith in the gospel of Christ. Romans 4, verse 13, “For the promise, that he should be the



heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Therefore, Gentile believers are true children of Abraham, and heirs of the promise. Note Galatians 3, verse 7 and verse 9.

That brings us to Moses and the Mosaic covenant. You may recall that while Moses was serving as a shepherd in the land of Midian, he encountered the Lord in the burning bush. God promised Moses that he would be with him, and instructed him to bring his people, once delivered from Egypt, back to this mountain, which was Horeb, or Sinai, to serve, or worship, God upon this mountain—Exodus 3, verse 12. God’s command to go get his people, and to bring them to worship him at Sinai, brings us to consider the significance of what transpired at this important place—at Mount Sinai—later. The continuity we have observed so far in the unfolding of God’s covenant of grace continues, the Mosaic covenant being one more development in the history of redemption. We’re going to consider this at greater length under the polemical section of this lecture.

The climax of the unfolding of the covenant of grace, in the Old Testament, comes in God’s covenant with David, the Davidic covenant. God’s purpose to redeem his people finds expression in the way he institutes his rule over them. The seed of the woman will be a kingly seed. The rest of the Old Testament will continue to appeal to the Davidic covenant, exemplifying the development of the covenant of grace, and setting before Israel God’s promises, and calling them to faith, repentance, and renewed obedience. But the key verse in the Davidic covenant is found in the reference to David’s seed, in 2 Samuel 7, verse 14, “I will be his father, and he shall be my son.” He is a man that will be God’s own Son! Well, this is quoted in reference to Christ, in Hebrews 1, verse 5. David’s promised son will ultimately be God’s own Son, a theme that is developed in the New Testament.

Lastly, we come to the new covenant. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, the minor prophets—they all provide several key texts on the new covenant. The difference between the old covenant and new covenant is not one of substance, but one of administration. You can read about this in Westminster Confession, chapter 7. We can only consider a few themes here. One important text is Jeremiah 31, verses 31 to 34, quoted in Hebrews 8. You’ll note the continuity with former covenants. “I . . . will be their God, and they shall be my people.” But it will be new blessings that God, once again, initiates. He will apply his law internally in their hearts in the new covenant. He will provide increased knowledge of himself. He’ll grant definitive, full forgiveness of sins, no longer in Old Testament symbols. Paul, writing in 2 Corinthians 3, shows the comparatively greater glory of the new covenant will surpass the glory of the old. Hebrews 8, 9, and 10 grounds this in the superiority of Christ’s ministry as a Mediator. Christ ratifies the new covenant in blood for the full remission of sins. Likewise, Ezekiel 36:25 to 27 promises cleansing, a new heart, and God’s Spirit put within his people, enabling them to walk in his statutes.

Lastly, and briefly, it may be helpful to summarize some of the points that we’ve learned about the continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Now, they must be held together. You cannot rightly understand the New Testament without a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, upon which the New Testament is built. Likewise, you must interpret the Old in light of the fulfillment in the New. In terms of continuity, both Old and New Testaments reveal the same God who is unchanging. To draw a contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the New Testament would be a destructive error, which heretics of the past have taught. Both Old and New Testaments reveal the same Savior. The Old Testament points forward to Christ, through types and shadows, and ceremonies, and the New Testament unveils his person and work in the full glory of his coming. The Old and New Testaments also set forth the same gospel of grace, and the

same covenant of grace. Contemporary Gentile believers are saved by faith in Christ, just as Abraham was redeemed. God does not have multiple plans for salvation throughout Biblical history. He unfolds one single, grand plan for redeeming his people after the fall, in the covenant of grace. So the Old Testament is full of gospel. The Old and New Testaments represent one people of God, one church under two administrations. In the New Testament, that church is greatly expanded, of course, through the influx of Gentile believers, as had been promised all through the Old Testament. So all of this reinforces that the whole Bible is the Christian Scriptures, and we must study and understand this whole Bible in terms of the continuity of the covenant of grace.

There are, however, clearly differences between the Old and New Testaments, and between the administration of the covenant of grace in the Old and in the New. The Old foretells, the New fulfills. So there are points of discontinuity that include the removal of the Old Testament ceremonial laws, institutions and regulations. The New Testament sets aside ceremonial worship, sacrifices, alters, priests, and so on, with rituals of purification, ceremonies of clean and unclean prohibitions. We have also Paul, who is warning us that we must not return to the shadows, when we stand in the presence of the person that they picture. To do so would be an affront to Christ, and would undermine his finished work.

Another difference includes the important place of kingdom expansion. The Old Testament did not exclude Gentiles altogether—think of Rahab, Ruth, Uriah, and others—but proportionately few Gentiles were enfolded in the covenant under the Old Testament church. The Old Testament was primarily a “come and see” model. God set Canaan, and Jerusalem in particular, as a light to the nations, and there were those attracted to learn about Jehovah and his salvation. But the New Testament issues a commission to “go and tell”—the gospel is taken to the nations. Beginning at Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth. And so the mission focuses on the expanding of Christ’s kingdom universally. Gentile nations are to be disciplined and added to Christ’s inheritance. Now, this was predicted in the Old Testament, in the earliest chapters of Genesis, but it comes to fruition in the New Testament.

One last category of discontinuity relates to the greater degrees of blessings in the New Testament, derived from the finished work of Christ. There’s a greater measure of the fulness of the Spirit given at Pentecost. We have more direct and immediate communion with God, without the aid of earthly priests. We have an increased assurance and heightened power in sanctification, and so on. So we see this covenant of grace grounded in the Bible and the continuity that carries all the way through.

Next, we must consider some errors related to the covenant of grace. And we will limit our focus to one dominant error. Some Christians have wrongly set the covenant with Moses, and the new covenant, in opposition to one another. The covenant of grace is portrayed as gracious, and the covenant with Moses as harsh, based on human merit. This is not what the Bible teaches, as I intend to prove. This is an important point in understanding the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, the relationship of law and gospel, and the work of Christ, and the place of the law in the life of the contemporary Christian.

So let me demonstrate the Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace. First of all, God’s first words at Sinai convey a message of redemption and the covenant of grace, Exodus 19, verses 4 and 5: “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.” God communicates the same emphasis of gospel redemption, in giving the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20, verse 2: “I am the

LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” He is their God—the God who saved and delivered them. There’s redemption from the bondage of Egypt that is foreshadowing the saving work of the coming of Christ.

But in addition, the law itself is full of the message of the gospel, and Christ as a Savior. The tabernacle, sacrifices, priesthood—all of these symbols convey wonderful theology about God’s provision of forgiveness, reconciliation, and fellowship with God. Yes, the law will constantly remind them of their inability to conform to God’s standards of holiness, and to love him comprehensively. And it is the law that teaches them to avail themselves of the sacrifices as they repent and cast themselves on God’s mercy. Remember the core of the covenant of grace? We see it repeated in the Mosaic covenant, for example, in Leviticus 26, verse 12, “And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.” You’ll see it elsewhere, Exodus 29, verse 45, and so on. In Leviticus 26, and in Deuteronomy 27 and 28, we see a greater revelation of the blessings and curses of covenant. Covenant breaking through unbelief and disobedience results in disqualification from the blessings, and the certain reaping of the curses. But even here, if Israel repents and turns back to the Lord, then they will again know the blessings in the covenant, as Leviticus 26 makes clear. This is fundamental and essential for understanding the later prophets and the background from the New Testament.

But do not make the mistake of thinking that this element is absent from the New Testament. Remember Ananias and Sapphira? Do you remember the grave warnings in 1 Corinthians 11 about unworthy participation in the Lord’s Supper? Or the language of Hebrews 6, Hebrews 10, Hebrews 12? And the startling threats that Christ gave to the seven churches of Asia, in Revelation 2 and 3, to just mention a few examples. There’s continuity even here. Many, many more connections could be drawn. For example, Christ’s words at the institution of the Lord’s Supper, “For this is my blood of the new testament”—Matthew 26, verse 28. That’s language taken, not from the Passover, but from Sinai, in Exodus 24, verse 8. And so we’ve dealt polemically with this objection of drawing opposition between Moses and Christ in the new covenant. And we’ve seen what the Bible teaches.

We can now draw a few brief, practical applications for ourselves. You can see how this covenant of grace leads us to delight in Christ, in all of the Scriptures. We see that the gospel is set forth in the unfolding of the covenant of grace, all the way from Genesis 3 through the whole Old Testament. And so we should, therefore, study the Old Testament accordingly. We should be looking for Christ and savoring him. We should be rejoicing in the gospel that we see there. We should be learning and putting our roots down into the soil of the Bible, in understanding God’s glorious redemption in the covenant of grace.

You think also, what better promise than the promise given in the covenant of grace? “I will be a God to you, and you will be my people.” I mean, this is astounding to us!—that the God of glory, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Judge of all the earth, that he would condescend and take us to himself, that we can say he is our God; that we can appropriate the fact that we are, if we’re savingly brought to the Lord Jesus Christ, we are as his people, that he owns us, that he’s actually married to his believing people in the covenant of grace, so that all that is Christ’s becomes ours, and we become his.

The household principle is also seen, “I will be a God to you, and to your seed after you.” And so we’re taught to raise our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, to point them to Christ, to set forth the gospel, to call them to faith and repentance, to teach them to pray that God would give them a new heart, and that he would take out the heart of stone; that he would give them faith, and that they would come to lay hold of Christ as he is offered to sinners in the gospel.

That reinforces for all of us, doesn't it, the call to receive those promises with faith. There is covenant keeping, and there is covenant breaking. And those who come, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to lay hold of Christ by faith stand in that covenant and reap all the blessings of it. But those who rebuff the gospel, and harden their hearts, break covenant with the Lord, and reap the curse as well. And so it reinforces the necessity of receiving promises with faith.

Lastly, we have the wonder of restoration of fellowship with God—that God invites his believing people into communion and fellowship with him. This is the life blood of living in the covenant of God's grace; to cultivate and to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever; to seek out those opportunities of nearness to him in his ordinances, and his promised presence, and to hold fellowship with him. The covenant of grace fuels all of these wonderful privileges.

Well, in this lecture, we've explored the Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace. When Adam broke the covenant of works, it left him and his posterity under the curse of death. God introduced the covenant of grace after the fall, as a provision of salvation for fallen sinners. This covenant stretches across the pages of Scripture, from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22; from immediately after the fall, into eternity. We have an enduring promise that he will be our God, and that we will be his people.

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

## *Module 3 ~ Lecture 10*

### **The Doctrine of the Law of God**

If I were to ask you exactly how much you weigh, you could guess, but if you wanted an accurate and precise answer, you would need to use a scale that measures weight. We're all accustomed to standards of measurement. If you want to know how tall you are, you use a tape measure or a ruler. The same could be said for measuring distance between two places, or the volume of a container, and so on. Standards provide precise accuracy. But the standards themselves must be exact and trustworthy, otherwise, all of the measurements will be thrown off. God has provided a perfect, infallible standard for measuring man spiritually, that is, for testing man's conformity to God's revealed will. That standard is God's moral law, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments. We're not left to guess or estimate how closely man matches what God requires. Man's whole life and character is tested by the objective rule given in God's law. The standard is unchanging, and it applies to all men, in all ages, in all places.

The theme of this last lecture ties together what we learned about the fall, about man's sinful nature, and about the continuity of Old and New Testaments. The series of lectures in this third module, or course, on Systematic Theology is devoted to the study of the Doctrine of Man. In the last two lectures, we considered the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace. And while the Covenant of Grace could also be included in the fifth module, under Doctrines of Salvation, it adds clarity to learn about those two covenants side by side. Building on the two previous lectures then, we now turn our attention to the Law of God, which is the rule of man's obedience and his duty towards God. The Ten Commandments are a concise summary of the entire ethical code given to the world by God, and expounded throughout the whole of Scripture.

And so, first of all, we'll begin by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the Doctrine of the Law of God. In Matthew 5, verses 17 to 19, which is part of the Sermon on the Mount, we read Jesus saying these words: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Notice a few things with regards to this text. Christ states explicitly that his coming did not destroy the law or the prophets. The word "law" is used in a variety of ways within the Bible. The word "law" can refer to God's will in general in some passages. It can refer to the whole Old Testament. It can refer to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. It can refer to the entirety of the Mosaic code. It can refer to any of the three categories of Mosaic law that we'll be

considering later in this lecture. But it can also refer to the Ten Commandments. And as you look at that passage in Matthew 5, in the remainder of the chapter, Christ makes clear what he means by “law”, because he goes on to expound the moral law found in the Ten Commandments. So likewise, when theologians speak of the law of God, they are most often referring to the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments.

Secondly, not only did Christ’s coming not dispose of the moral law, but Christ says that it will continue until heaven and earth pass away, which is to say, until the end of time. The preservation of the moral law applies to every detail. Jesus says every jot or tittle, and that refers, in the Hebrew language, to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and a little stroke of the pen that’s a part of some of the letters. He goes on to say that it applies to the least of these commandments. Jesus was drawing upon, actually, what the law and prophets themselves had taught. Because in the law, we read, “But those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law”—Deuteronomy 29:29. And in the prophets, we are told, “As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever”—Isaiah 59, verse 21. In addition, we see that Christ issues a sober warning to any who curtail, in the least degree, the revelation we have received from him in the moral law. The person who teaches others to break the least of his commandments will be least in the kingdom of heaven. Those who uphold and teach them will be great in the kingdom. Christ does not diminish the demands of the moral law. He actually intensifies their application. So in confronting the perversions of the Pharisees, who restricted the law to outward actions, Jesus teaches a more thorough, penetrating application of the law to man’s thoughts and heart and motives, not just his outward actions. You’ll remember, he says—the Pharisees thought that if they committed physical adultery, they were breaking the seventh commandment—Jesus says, Now, wait, if you even look upon a woman lustfully, you’re committing adultery in your heart. And he does that with the commandments that are expounded in that chapter. All of this introduces us to God’s permanent moral standard for man. If we’re going to understand man, which is the theme of this whole series or module, we need to understand God’s moral standard.

That brings us secondly, to considering some of the doctrinal details regarding the moral law of God. In the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 19, paragraph 1, we’re taught that God’s moral law was first given to Adam in the Garden, prior to the fall. Now, in the opening chapters of Genesis, you can trace the seeds of the moral law revealed to Adam, the various commandments. And this includes the fourth commandment, the Sabbath, as you’ll note in the opening verses of Genesis 2. But we also learn that God’s moral law was written on the heart of man. Romans 2, verse 15 says, “Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” But then in Westminster Confession, chapter 19, paragraph 2, it goes on to say this: “This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai in ten commandments, and written in two tables; the first four commandments containing our duty towards God, and the other six our duty to man.” Now you can compare this to what the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, in questions 39 to 42. “The duty which God requires of man, is obedience to his revealed will. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law.” And that moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments. Christ went on to say, in the Gospels, that the first table of the law—commandments one to four—reveals our duty

to God, namely, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and the second table of the law—commandments five to ten—reveal our duty to man, namely, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Secondly, we see that the law is a transcript and revelation of God's character, and therefore, an expression of eternal truth, binding on all creatures, from creation to eternity. In other words, the law reveals who God is, and, what God requires. It reveals his holiness, for example. We read, "Be ye holy, as I am holy"—that's set in the context of God's law: Leviticus 11, verse 44; Leviticus 19, verse 2; chapter 20, verse 7. And this remains the standard in the New Testament, as seen when it is quoted by Peter, in 1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 16. "Holiness" is one of the most prominent words in the Bible to express the character of God. You'll remember the vision of Isaiah, in Isaiah 6, "Holy, holy, holy." Holiness, as we saw in the previous lecture, refers to both separation, and to purity—separation from sin, and to purity. God's laws of holiness emphasize the difference between a holy God and a sinful people. Now, the redeemed are called by gospel grace to share in God's holiness, by being separate and different from the rest of humanity. God alone has the authority to define sin, as a holy God. When we refuse to call something sin that God calls sin, or alternatively, when we call something sin that God does not call sin, we are usurping God's authority, and taking it for ourselves. So we see holiness.

We also see love. God is love, and we see his promise of love, even in the law. In the beginning of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord thy God." What can he give more than himself? Just as the promise is a promise of love, so his precepts are precepts of love. We're told, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." It's speaking about love for the Lord. Rather than an antithesis between law and love, there's an inextricable connection between them. "Love is the fulfilling of the law"—Romans 13:10. Love is expressed by obedience to the law. "If you love me, keep my commandments," we read in 1 John 5:3, and in the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verse 15. The law is summarized in terms of love, as we saw a few moments ago from Matthew 22, verses 37 to 40.

This love is closely connected to another revelation of God's character, his jealousy. He's a jealous God. "The Lord thy God," which is repeated through the first table of the law. You'll notice, for example, in the second commandment, when we're told not to make any graven images, it's because he's a jealous God. He puts his name and claim on Jacob's seed, "Thou art mine." And jealousy is the fire of love, and of holiness. So we see that this law is a revelation of who God is.

Thirdly, understanding the different categories of law will help you make sense of the points of continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament law and the New Testament. Some laws are permanent, other laws are temporary. But realize that, even Old Testament believers understood these categories and distinctions. I'm not going to cover that here, but you see it coming out in the Psalms. You see it in relationship to King Saul, in the prophets, and so on. The church down through the ages has distinguished between three primary categories within the law. There's moral law, which we've been talking about, summarized in the Ten Commandments. There's judicial law, and there's, thirdly, ceremonial law. So we'll consider these very briefly.

In contrast to the moral law—the Ten Commandments—the ceremonial laws pointed forward as shadows to the person and work of Christ, and the result of that work in the New Testament. You had the clean and unclean laws, separation and purity laws, laws pertaining to the temple and tabernacle worship, the sacrificial system, and so on. All of these pointed forward to Christ, but were fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The picture book, all of these types are no longer needed, we have the fulness of Christ in his completed work, and so those laws have completely expired with Christ's coming. We see this in Colossians 2, verses 16 and 17. We see it in Galatians 4;

1 Timothy 4, verses 1 to 4; Hebrews, really chapters 8, 9, and 10; Acts, chapter 10, and many other places.

Secondly, the judicial law refers to the case laws, or political-economic laws of Israel. These were sociopolitical laws that applied to Israel's theocracy as a unique nation. Westminster Confession of Faith states, in chapter 19, that they expired with the state of Israel, and are only obligatory as far as, "the general equity thereof may require." In addition to these, and in addition to what we've already noted, the moral law, which is sometimes called the decalogue—that word means "ten words"—the ten words of God. Consider, for example, the language of Exodus 34, verse 28, and Deuteronomy 4, verse 13, and Deuteronomy 10, verse 4. These ten words were written with the Lord's finger on tables of stone—Exodus 31, verse 18; chapter 34, verse 1; Deuteronomy 5, verse 22; Deuteronomy 9, verse 10, and so on. The fact that they were written by the Lord's finger on tables of stone, showed their permanence—they're set apart. Notice Deuteronomy 5, verse 22, where it says, "These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more," the passage says. "And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me." So you see something of the permanence of those ten commandments. Those ten commandments, of course, were placed in the ark, under the symbolic feet of God.

Fourthly, let me say something in terms of summary of the relationship of law and gospel. In brief, the law drives us to Christ in the gospel, and the gospel drives us back to the law. So the law shows us our sin and our need for a Savior, sending us to the gospel. And those who come by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel then sends us to the law as a rule of life, to instruct us on how to glorify God. So both law and gospel are means of grace in the Scriptures, used by the Lord. Obedience to the law was never a means of justification, and is not a means of justification, but rather, it is an expression, in the life of sanctification, of the believer's love. So the law and gospel work together, and must not be separated. The law, the moral law makes Christ more precious to the believer. He perfectly and fully obeyed all of the law's precepts for his believing people, so they are united to him, who did for them what they could never do for themselves, in terms of perfect obedience to God's standard. In the New Testament, Jesus and Paul confront distortions of the use of the moral law. They're defending and upholding the right use of it. So Paul, after refuting the use of the law as a means of justification, or the idea of obeying the law to earn or merit acceptance with God, having refuted that, he says, at the end of Romans 3, in verse 31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

Fifthly, we should say something about the three uses of the moral law—the three uses. The first use of the moral law is for restraining wickedness, and maintaining order in the world. This is sometimes referred to as the civil use of the law. So the proclamation of the law serves as a restraining influence against sin in the world. God's authority over men in general is upheld, and serves as the basis for law systems among the nations. The second use pertains to the fact that the law reveals sin. It terrifies the conscience. It awakens us to our neediness and drives us to Christ. This is referred to sometimes as the pedagogical use of the law. This brings man under conviction, and makes him conscious of his inability to meet the demands of the law. Thus the law is a tutor to lead us to Christ. This continues to be true for the believer in his sanctification, as well as the unbeliever in their need of conversion. The third use is to instruct believers in how to live a life of godliness out of love and gratitude for their redemption. This is referred to the law as a rule of life for the believer. This directs us as to our duties, and the sins which we must put to death and avoid. It directs us in the way of righteous living in salvation. Our motivation for loving and keeping the



law is one of gratitude and love for the redemption we have in Christ. That love is demonstrated by obedience. And the standard of obedience is God's character, seen in the law. So to summarize the three uses: the law is a restrainer—that's the first; a revealer—that's the second; and a rule—that's the third use.

Sixthly, in terms of our doctrinal exposition, we should say something about the rules for interpreting the Ten Commandments. I would encourage you to look at Westminster Larger Catechism, question 99, for more information on this, and we'll cover this very quickly, some rules for interpreting the Ten Commandments.

Well, we're to recognize it is perfect, the law is perfect, and requires full conformity in the whole man. So each command requires full perfection in every duty. Every command forbids the least degree of every sin. Secondly, we see that it is spiritual, that it reaches every aspect of men, our will, our mind, our affections, our words, our actions, our gestures, our motives, our thoughts. We saw this in Matthew 5, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We also recognize that there are various aspects of the same thing often addressed in multiple commands. Another one, and this is important, the opposite of each command is always binding. So when a duty is commanded, the contrary is forbidden; but when a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded. When a promise is given, the opposite threatening is included, and when a threatening is given, the opposite promise is included. The commands are exhaustive—they're exhaustive for all of time. So what God forbids is never to be done; what God commands is constantly our duty. Under every duty, and under every sin that's forbidden, all of the same kinds are addressed, including the causes and the means and the occasions and appearances of it, or provocations to it. Whatever is commanded to us, we are bound to endeavor to see others keep, as far as we are able. Whatever is commanded of others, we are bound ourselves to help them keep. We're to keep it and assist them in keeping it. We're forbidden to partake with them in what is forbidden, and we're to help them to avoid what is forbidden. Those are some brief rules to help us in interpreting the law of God.

Thirdly, third main point of this lecture, we need to consider some errors relating to the moral law, and we're going to specify two here. First of all, a theological system that goes under the title, dispensationalism. Dispensationalism teaches a stark discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. So God's intentions, we're told, in the Old Testament, failed, and thus he's created a better system in the New Testament. God deals with his people in a variety of modes and administrations, with differing plans of redemption throughout history. God's whole mode of operation in the Old Testament was radically different than in the New Testament. The common conclusion among various schools of dispensationalism is that the moral law has been totally abrogated in the New Testament, and replace with a different standard—what they call "the law of Christ." If something from the Old Testament is not repeated in the New Testament, then it's

only illustrative—it gives us illustrations of things. And there's all sorts of problematic ramifications that come from this: the relationship of Old and New Testaments; the relationship of Israel and the church; the relationship of law and gospel; as well as implications for our view of the future and end times, and so on. So you can see how what dispensationalism is teaching is contradictory to all that we've seen in this lecture, with regards to the permanent standard of God's moral law.

Secondly, I want to highlight specifically attacks on the fourth commandment, on the Sabbath, as a perpetual command. Because, of the ten, this is the one that is most frequently rejected. And there are several things we can say here. I'll try to say it quickly. First of all, we see the Sabbath appears prior to the fall, in Genesis 2, verses 2 to 3. It was established as a creation ordinance. This precedes the fall, so it has relevance apart from sin and redemption. The Sabbath belongs,

in other words, to the same category as other creation ordinances, like marriage, and work, and procreation, and is no more abrogated than they are. The Sabbath is built into the very structure of the universe. A seven-day work-week, and all attempts to change that to a ten-day week, or whatever else, has been a dismal failure. Furthermore, in Exodus 16, verses 22 to 30, we have an account of God stipulating for the people necessary preparations for the Sabbath, which existed prior to the giving of the Mosaic covenant at Sinai. There was no interruption in the flow of Sabbath observance from the time of Adam, to the ratification of the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments. And that brings us to the fact that, in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, the Sabbath is embedded in the Ten Commandments. These commands, as we've seen, are moral in nature, and are a continuing standard for all time, as a reflection of the character of God. These commands were engraved in stone by the finger of God, showing their unchangeable standard for all time. We also saw Jesus affirms this in Matthew 5, verses 17 to 19, regulating the conduct of all nations and all peoples. So failing to set apart one day in seven is as sinful as stealing, or committing adultery, or a violation of any of the other of the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, we see in Exodus 35:2, and in Numbers 15, verses 32 and following, the penalty for desecrating the Sabbath was capital punishment under the Old Testament. Well, this establishes irrefutably the importance of keeping the Sabbath to Jehovah. Can you think of anything that merited capital punishment in the Old Testament that is not considered a sin in the New Testament? It should be fixed in our minds that the Lord does not take lightly violations of this moral law. Furthermore, the Hebrew word "Shabbat"—the word for Sabbath—means "to cease or to rest." Isaiah 58:13 and 14, says that we're not to profane the Sabbath by treading down and suppressing it, that we have six days that we are to work, and one that we are to rest. Indeed, within the fourth commandment itself, our life is patterned after divine example. The Sabbath of God's rest, six days of creating the world, the seventh resting, is the reason for the Sabbath of man's rest. He blessed our Sabbath, because he first blessed and sanctified his Sabbath. Professor John Murray, a Reformed theologian from the twentieth century, said, "Has the divine example become obsolete? Can we think of the exemplar established by God's working and resting as ever ceasing to be the pattern for man's conduct in the ordinance of labor and rest?" We also learn in this commandment that all who are under our responsibility and jurisdiction are to cease from their normal six-day labors and recreation. Nehemiah 10, verses 29 and 31, illustrates that we are not to buy food or support those who buy and sell, engage in commercial enterprise or activity, on the Sabbath day.

But rest is not equated with inactivity. Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working," but that's long after the six days of creation. God ceased from his creating work, and continued his work of providence. We cease from our six-day labors and recreation, and devote ourselves to worship, and the works of mercy and necessity. Contrary to the view of some, in both the Old Testament and New Testament, the whole day was devoted to rest and worship: Leviticus 23:3; Ezekiel 46:3; or in the New Testament, Acts 13, verse 14; and Revelation 1, verse 10. You'll note the words in Hebrews 4, verse 9: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." That Greek word, rest, is actually "Sabbath-keeping." There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-keeping to the people of God. Hebrews 4 is pointing forward to heaven, as a picture of an eternal Sabbath, and a weekly Sabbath is a signpost, or a picture that's pointing forward to that eternal Sabbath. Well, the signpost can't be taken away until the thing that it's pointed to arrives. You know, the weekly Sabbath will be set aside, when we come to an eternal Sabbath in heaven, but until then, there is a Sabbath-keeping that remains for God's people. Isaiah 58, (verses) 13 and 14, describe the Sabbath as a delight, and as honorable, as a day of celebration and joy, joy in the

Lord, triumph, feasting, and so on. It is a day in which the people of God get to do what they love most, and that is, spend a whole day, undiverted, with the Lord.

Well, fourthly, we can now draw some practical application for ourselves, and I want to do so by directing us to the believer's love for the moral law of God. We sing about this in the Psalms, in Psalm 119, verse 97: "Oh, love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day," or in Psalm 1, verse 2, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night." You see it expressed in the life of Joshua, in Joshua 1, verse 8: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." We find the same language in the New Testament. Paul, in Romans 7, verse 12, 14, and 22, it says: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. . . For we know that the law is spiritual"—and he goes on—"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." We read about it in 1 Timothy 1, verse 8: "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." Or, the words of 1 John 5, verse 3: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." What is the point, in terms of application, we are to cultivate a love for God's law, and what happens? We think about what we love, and we speak about what we think about. So, if we're cultivating a love for God's law, it's going to be in our minds, meditating on it; it's going to be in our mouths, and so on. But we can say more, because we also need to apply this in terms of thinking that God's law reveals the glory and holiness of God to us. That should lead us to worship and adore him. It causes us to walk humbly before God and men, reminding us that we have not arrived. The law comes, by way of application, it pierces into the depths of our soul and reveals the areas that we need to grow in sanctification and Christ's likeness. Yes, it convicts us of sin, teaching us to hate it and mortify it. It teaches us how to walk and live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord, by his grace, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It also gives wisdom for decisions and godly living—that comes out with the psalmist. Living in accord with God's law is the way of blessing; living in violation of his law brings hardship: "The way of the transgressor is hard." This is part of why the psalmist makes it his constant meditation. But most of all, it makes Christ more precious to the believer. He perfectly and fully obeyed all of the law's precepts for his people. And those who are believers are united to him, who did for them what they could never do for themselves, making them acceptable before God, giving them access into his presence, and enabling them by the Spirit to live for his glory.

Well, in this lecture, we've explored the Doctrine of God's Moral Law, the permanent rule that guides man's duty to God. This law is written in the hearts of men, and revealed in writing, in the Ten Commandments. We cannot understand the Doctrine of Man without knowing the standard to which God holds man. This exposes the sinner's great need for a Savior. It magnifies the glory of Christ and all that he has secured in the redemption of his people, and it provides an enduring rule, wisely to guide the believer in their pursuits of love and gratitude to God for their salvation.

Well, this brings this series of lectures for this third module on Systematic Theology to a close. We began in the first module with the Doctrine of First Principles, in the second module the Doctrine of God, and now in this third module, which we are completing, the Doctrine of Man. Now, in the fourth module which is to come, we will turn our attention to the Doctrine of Christ, and the revelation of the glory of his Person and his work.