



SATAN'S AWFUL IDEA

A Biblical Theology
Of Satan's Fall
And Its Implications
On The Unfolding Human Drama

Austin Brown

Satan's Awful Idea

A Biblical Theology
of Satan's Fall
and its Implications
on the Unfolding
Human Drama

~Austin C. Brown~

Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him? (Psalm 89:5-7)

Satan's Awful Idea
Published 2014
Copyright 2014 Austin Brown

~

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture references are
taken from the English Standard Bible.

~

Feel free to share or quote from this work, but please
do not alter the content in any way.

~

For more information about the author, go to the
website www.GentleReformation.com

To all the pastors/theologians who have made their audio materials
available for free.

Part I

-An Angel Falls-

Chapter 1

-A Cosmic Problem-

When God was forming the universe, causing vast stars to burst into existence, setting colorful planets into orbit and establishing the measurements of the earth, the angels, we are told, sang and shouted for joy (Job 38:7). For in that moment, they were witnessing something never before seen: the awe-inspiring power and unparalleled creativity of God.

What a wonder it must have been to see clusters of galaxies flash into being by virtue of their Maker merely speaking. One can only guess what the angels were feeling. Was it the utter vastness of the universe that most impressed upon them the incomparable majesty of God? Was it His inexhaustible power that caused them to rejoice so fervently? Was it His glory reflected in the created order that inspired their lyrics? Or maybe it was the sheer novelty of physicality that most startled them? What indeed, after all, was this new substance, this matter with its own peculiar laws and textures and scents?

Whatever it was that most impressed them, they sang. They crafted songs extolling the glories of their triune Maker, singing with delight. But it is strange to think that amid all the singing, amid all the celebrating and joyous outbursts, there was an angel, an angel we know as Lucifer¹, praising the excellencies of the Son. It is difficult, given all that we presently know, to imagine him covering his face, crying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts.” But worship he did. It’s what he was made for.

¹ While I don’t think Satan was originally named Lucifer, the moniker has become part of common parlance, and so for the sake of simplicity, I’ll use it to describe the angel before his fall.

So what happened? Why would such a glorious creature, living in such a glorious place, beholding such a glorious Creator, conceive unrighteousness? Why did high treason spring to life in his heart? Such questions are perplexing. They're perplexing because the Scriptures are surprisingly silent, offering little by way of direct explanation. Indeed, out of the thousands of verses comprising the Bible, only a handful pull the curtain back and offer us a glimpse backstage. And even these are debated.

In light of this, the cautious among us, when pressed for an answer as to what happened, often appeal to mystery, warning with sober intonations, "Beware of speculation, all ye theologians. Let not your imagination run wild."² True enough. Yet for all the silence, there are other tantalizing passages of Scripture whose scope and magnitude are so grand, so other worldly, that the student of Scripture cannot help but contemplate such affairs. His mind cannot help but think about the angelic realm and matters peculiar to them, for his attention is drawn away from this world and pointed towards another. Because of this, the Christian inevitably

² Calvin's response to those who pry into things which they ought not is especially enjoyable. He says, "When a certain shameless fellow mockingly asked a pious old man what God had done before the creation of the world, the latter aptly countered that he had been building hell for the curious. Let this admonition, no less grave than severe, restrain the wantonness that tickles many and even drives them to wicked and hurtful speculations" John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), 141. Again, but in a different context, and regarding those who inquire into the celestial fall, he says, "Most men are curious and make no end of inquiries on these things; but since God in Scripture has only sparingly touched on them, and as it were by the way, he thus reminds us that we ought to be satisfied with this small knowledge. And indeed they who curiously inquire, do not regard edification, but seek to feed their souls with vain speculations. What is useful to us, God has made known, that is, that the devils were at first created, that they might serve and obey God, but that through their own fault they apostatized, because they would not submit to the authority of God; and that thus the wickedness found in them was accidental, and not from nature, so that it could not be ascribed to God" John Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Peter*, (<http://www.ccle.org>), 2:4.

asks fundamental questions, questions as simple as: What happened in heaven so very long ago?

Merely consider Ephesians 3:8-10 in this respect. Who can read this and not scratch their head in wonder? There Paul writes:

“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”

Note the Apostle’s astonishing conclusion why grace was given to him to preach to the Gentiles. The explanation isn’t that Gentiles would be saved. It isn’t that the OT would be fulfilled. It’s something wildly different. Look again at verse ten. Paul says, remarkably, that God is displaying His wisdom “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” *That* is the reason why there is an entity called the church, so far as this verse is concerned.

Pause for a moment and think back over redemptive history. Think of Abraham lying in a field on a clear night counting the twinkling stars above him. Think of Joseph, that young man in his multi-colored coat, being cast into a pit. Think of the baby Moses gliding down the Nile among the reeds. Think of King David with his mighty men routing armies, and Nathan the prophet, declaring that God would make David’s name great and provide an everlasting heir to the throne of Israel. And think of the long lineage that continued generation after generation, through all the struggles and twists, until at last Christ the Messiah emerged on the scene of human history, fulfilling all that was written. Think of His earth shattering miracles and His remarkable teachings and how He, the Son of God, the son of Adam, bore the curse and died for the sins of His people. Think how all of this, all the mighty acts, all the history, all the richness of God’s dealings with His people, is, in one profound sense, designed to make a simple point. And what is that

point? It is this: God is wise. If that weren't enough, this display of wisdom, says Paul, isn't merely for us, but it is also for angels.

What a staggering thought!

Not only does the conclusion move in a surprising direction, but it suggests that there is something else at play behind the scenes; something grand; something otherworldly; and yes, something very intentional. There must be a reason why God wants to magnify his wisdom before the watchful eyes of angels.

So it is precisely verses like Ephesians 3:8-10 that, when woven together with a host of other equally provocative passages, form a very definite picture of Satan's fall from grace and the ensuing struggle that marks our history. Each strand of data provides a piece to the puzzle. Each facet offers another angle. And if there are pieces, and if there are angles, then surely a larger picture can be constructed.

It is, therefore, the burden of this present volume to thread together such passages and reconstruct what went wrong so very long ago. As a result, a fresh theory concerning Satan's fall will be presented and defended in detail. Moreover, a significant portion of time will be devoted to exploring the nature of the angelic rebellion, and how it not only impacts our world, but profoundly informs us about the meaning of human history and life. Indeed, in the view of this author, the two are intimately related and dare not be separated.

Initial Challenges to the Topic

In terms of this study, let it be granted that there is little by way of direct evidence regarding the circumstances and nature of Lucifer's fall. It is no insurmountable obstacle. In the same way that a detective will carefully examine all available evidence, interview witnesses, corroborate known events and contemplate motives in the hopes of reconstructing the past, so too we can examine God's response to Satan, as well as the subtle, and not so subtle clues found in Scripture, and gain some measure of insight into what originally transpired between them. We can examine the

trail of evidence and move backwards. We can consider how God has countered Satan and ponder why He has responded in such peculiar ways. Motives and actions tell a story.

This approach isn't entirely unlike the theologian's task of making sense of the New Testament epistles. We only have one side of the conversation in those letters. But through a careful study of the details- the specific concerns raised, the particular emphasis, the tone, the setting and historical circumstances- we can reasonably reconstruct the background issues and better appreciate the circumstances surrounding the dispatched letters.

So it is with God's epistle, the Bible.

Reconstructing the past, however, poses several challenges. For one, conjecture is unavoidable. It's simply the nature of such an endeavor. I can still remember the first time I taught the basic ideas of this book in a small group setting. Wanting to show just how confident I felt discussing the subject, I entitled the lesson, "An Admittedly Speculative Look at an Enigmatic Conundrum." Naturally the title received a few chuckles, which is what I was aiming for, but behind the humor I was making a serious point. No matter how creative one might be with their working backwards from the data, the past is still cloaked to some degree. Did Noah ever get a splinter in his finger? Surely he did, but since we aren't told, we can't be absolutely sure.

There is much to be gleaned from examining the biblical data concerning the fall of Satan and God's war against sin. But to the extent that we seek to imagine what precipitated the angelic fall, thinking not only about God's response to Lucifer, but actually outlining Lucifer's thought process, speculation is unavoidable. That being said, all speculation will be held firmly in the grip of Scripture; where it draws lines in the sand, there conjecture will venture no further.

Another challenge is how to best proceed. Should the evidence first be examined before a reconstruction of the primordial past is offered, or should the overall theory be presented before considering the evidence in detail? Both approaches have their shortcomings. In the first instance, it's hard to talk about details

without having some idea of the big picture. But if one starts with the big picture, it might appear flimsy or unsubstantiated, an unanchored idea floating adrift. Moreover, and this is a point of considerable concern, if one starts with a theory, it's terribly tempting to make the data fit the theory. It's tempting to squeeze the Scriptures into a particular mold, with everything dangling outside the neat and tidy box lopped off in the usual procrustean fashion.

D.A. Carson aptly states the problem:

"I frequently tell my doctoral students as they embark on their research that dissertations in the broad field of the arts disciplines, including Biblical and theological disciplines, can, at the risk of slight oversimplification, be divided into two camps. In the first camp, the student begins with an idea, a fresh insight, a thesis he or she would like to test against the evidence. In the second, the student has no thesis to begin with but would like to explore the evidence in a certain domain to see exactly what is going on in a group [of] texts and admits to uncertainty about what the outcome will be. The advantage of the first kind of thesis is that the work is exciting from the beginning and directed by the thesis that is being tested; the danger is that, unless the student takes extraordinary precautions and proves to be remarkably self-critical, the temptation to domesticate the evidence in order to defend the thesis becomes well-nigh irresistible. The advantage of the second kind of thesis is that it is likely to produce more even-handed results than the first, since the researcher has no axe to grind and is therefore more likely to follow the evidence wherever it leads; the danger is that there may not be much of a thesis at the end of the process, but merely a lot of well-organized data. In reality, of course, dissertation projects regularly straddle both camps in various ways.³

³ D.A. Carson, *Review of Biblical Literature* (Volume 12, 2007), 3.

The present volume will embark on a bold mission. It's going to attempt to resist the "well-nigh irresistible," which means that we are going to move fairly quickly towards establishing a general conclusion. The thesis will emerge before the bulk of the evidence is presented.⁴ This means that we're going sketch out a picture of what transpired between God and Lucifer, present a general outline of their confrontation and thereby provide a framework on which to hang our hat and unpack the biblical data more thoroughly. Sometimes it's better to step back and consider the mountain range before walking its paths. My concern is that the first two or three chapters will bother the theologically astute, as it might feel impossibly distant from concrete texts. They may feel it would please Milton, but not the Westminster divines. Here I can but only ask my more bushy browed readers to exercise a measure of patience, as well as assure them that this author desperately wants to anchor everything in Scripture. So to stress the point again, chapters three through ten will dive headlong into the world of texts and theology and actively support the proposed thesis.

Persuasive Pride?

Let's begin where most theologians end.

When asked what fueled the fall of Lucifer, many reply, and not without warrant, that pride was the driving force. As one of God's most excellent creatures, possessing both marvelous beauty and penetrating wisdom, this spiritual being, at some point, began

⁴ Although it should be stressed that I didn't first develop the thesis and then examine the evidence. The thesis emerged rather suddenly and unexpectedly after chewing on the subject for some time. And in many ways, one could say that this work arose as a result of several key influences in my life. If one were to reduce this to some kind of strange formula, I would say that if you added Cornelius Van Til with Jonathan Edwards with John Piper with John Currid, and then stirred them around in my mind, you would better understand how and why I arrived at the conclusions I did. In other words, I am greatly indebted to these thinkers.

to think more highly of himself than he ought to have. And this bubbling arrogance propelled him into sin.

John MacArthur, commenting on Ezekiel 28, describes it this way,

“This glorious, anointed cherub, maybe the worship leader of all the heavenly hosts, became infatuated by his own splendor, by his own beauty, by his own perfection. And so Verse 16 says, “You were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; so I have cast you as profane.” What’s the violence? I’ll tell you what it was: Once Satan began to sin the sin of pride and began to be infatuated by his own splendor and his own glory and the wonder of his own person, he then sought violently to usurp the place of whom? God.”⁵

Donald Barnhouse says something similar,

“There came a time when this being, filled with pride because of his own power and attainments, entertained the thought in his heart that he could govern independently of God. He therefore proclaimed that he would set up an independent rule, whereupon a multitude of the angelic beings of heaven decided to follow his rule and join him in his rebellion against God.”⁶

Erwin Lutzer, likewise commenting on Ezekiel 28:15-17, says,

“With that breathtaking comment we have a description of how sin entered the universe... What was this sin, this unrighteousness? In a word, it was arrogance... His beauty and position led to hardened pride.”⁷

⁵ John MacArthur, *The Fall of Satan*, which can be found online at: (<http://www.gty.org/resources/print/sermons/90-237>).

⁶ Donald Barnhouse, *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 22.

⁷ Erwin Lutzer, *The Serpent of Paradise* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 27.

Matthew Henry, commentating on Jude 6, says,

“There were a great number of the angels who *left their own habitation*; that is, who were not pleased with the posts and stations the supreme Monarch of the universe had assigned and allotted to them, but thought (like discontented ministers in our age, I might say in every age) they deserved better; they would, with the title of *ministers*, be *sovereigns*, and in effect their Sovereign should be their minister—do all, and only, what they would have him; thus was pride the main and immediate cause or occasion of their fall. Thus they quitted their post, and rebelled against God, their Creator and sovereign Lord.”⁸

And journeying back into the halls of history, Peter Lombard states,

“Their [the elect angels] cleaving to God by charity was their converting to Him, their [the non-elect angels] holding of Him in hatred and/or envying of Him was their turning away. For indeed envy is the mother of the pride, by which the latter wanted to make themselves the peers of God.”⁹

Nearly everyone admits that pride played a pivotal role in Lucifer’s fall. And really, if a passage like 1 Timothy 3:6 is going to be taken seriously, which appears to link conceit with the condemnation of the devil, then one should feel compelled to agree. That being said, a difficulty emerges when Lucifer’s self infatuation is perceived as the singular reason propelling his fall.

I cannot remember when the question first entered my mind, but some time ago, probably during one of my customary walks, I asked myself, “But would mere pride be persuasive?” I had in mind this topic. And when the question presented itself, it occurred to me that the usual way of thinking about Lucifer’s fall,

⁸ Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, volume 5), 759.

⁹ Peter Lombard, *Sentences* 2, 5:1

his infatuation with his own beauty and subsequent elevation of self *and drawing away a host of other angels after him*, couldn't, or at least it couldn't without some difficulty, explain why Lucifer's claims would be at all persuasive to other angelic beings.

Why?

Consider what it's suggesting. Suppose Lucifer thought, based upon his own grand notions of himself, that he could govern as God, indeed, that he could be God. Given the fact that he convinced a number of angels to follow him in his treasonous ambitions, we must surely think that he presented some kind of argument for doing so. There must have been a presentation of sorts, an explanation why they should follow him. Now picture him making his appeal. What would he say? "Look at how beautiful I am. Follow me?" Lucifer might have been beautiful, but could he compare- could he a mere creature- even begin to eclipse the infinite majesty and beauty and glory of God Almighty? The angels only had to behold God again to know the folly of such a claim. What about his wisdom? Again, what angel would have found this at all convincing? Lucifer was surely very intelligent, even extraordinarily intelligent, but were the angels unable to perceive the vast gulf between their Maker and Lucifer? Surely not. Or what about Lucifer's power? Could he create something out of nothing? No. Was he eternal? No. Was he omnipotent? Obviously not. The angels knew these things very well, otherwise, why were they worshipping God? They knew God was qualitatively different.¹⁰

One could imagine, through some effort, Lucifer convincing himself that he could be God, actually deluding himself into thinking that he could trump God's rule. But would one angel's self-exalting and patently crazy self-delusions prove at all persuasive to others, especially creatures that were pure in their affections and communing with God? It's a difficult pill to swallow. Angels aren't stupid. Surely they would have recognized the folly of this kind of

¹⁰ This is to say that while none of the angels sat under Cornelius Van Til, nor did they check out any of his books from the local seminary, they surely had a firm grasp of the Creator/creature distinction.

claim. Moreover, who is to say that the elect angels didn't try to dissuade others from believing Lucifer? Surely they did. We don't know, of course, exactly how angels communicate, or even how their society operates, but it is surely reasonable to suppose, based upon the fact that Lucifer did persuade some to follow him, that there must have been some debate, or at least dialogue, about such matters. There had to be a "weighing out" of what Lucifer was suggesting. And in that context, surely detractors had *good reasons* for declining his offer, reasons that could be expressed to those being lured away.

It would seem, therefore, crucial to Lucifer's entire polemic, if it were going to prove convincing, and if it were going to be able to draw angelic servants away from the throne of the Most High, that it sound not only persuasive, but appear plausible. In this respect, it's hard to imagine a good looking, yet arrogant angel convincing a host of other angels to rebel against God on these terms. It's a hard sell, even for a slick talker.

So what are we left with? Several things can be safely inferred. First, whatever we say happened, pride must have featured prominently in Lucifer's fall. We will see, in due course, that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 do tell us something about the fall of Lucifer, even though they are addressing human individuals. So we can't ignore the factor of pride. Secondly, whatever Lucifer conceived, it must have at least sounded persuasive. It must have been able to sway convictions. Thirdly, and this is closely connected with the second point, it must have had an air of plausibility. Persuasion cannot be divorced from plausibility. In other words, whatever Lucifer promoted, it must have appeared reasonable to his listeners. It wasn't patently absurd on the face of things. For example, it would have been ridiculous for Lucifer to suddenly argue that God didn't exist. That wouldn't have been plausible, and therefore totally unpersuasive. Fourthly, there must have been something to be gained by following Lucifer. In order for angels to commit treason against the King of Kings, they must have thought there was something to be acquired, some benefit to be had, or some pleasure

to take hold of. Why else would they organize under Lucifer, if not for such reasons?

Think of Eve in this respect. Are we not told, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate...” (Gen 3:6). Desire. Delight. Goodness. Wisdom. All these moved her hand to take and eat. So it is with all sentient beings. They evaluate (weigh pros and cons) and then either act or refrain.¹¹

In a nutshell, Lucifer’s argument, whatever its message, surely had to:

- Flow from pride
- Sound persuasive
- Seem plausible
- Appear to promise real gain

None of this directly explains why Lucifer fell of course, but it helps move us in the right direction. It highlights our need to grapple with the *content* of Lucifer’s argument, which inevitably leads us to wonder what in the world could have persuaded angels, including Lucifer, to sin against God. In this respect, we need to focus our attention, not only on the pride that motivated Lucifer, but on the content of the message he delivered.

So we ask again: What idea could have swayed angelic minds?

¹¹ This helps steer us away from thinking too simplistically about Lucifer’s trickery. Along these lines, someone might want to say that Lucifer simply fooled them or duped them. Deception no doubt played a role, but given the fact that a large number of angels didn’t follow Lucifer, one must surely suppose that there was marked disagreement. And if marked disagreement, then surely debate, or something closely resembling debate. Shall we say opposition? The upshot is that for those angels who did follow Lucifer, they must have made a calculated choice to follow him. Treason is never taken lightly.

Reflections on Glory

Before an answer is provided, more groundwork should be laid by considering the subject of worship, as it was probably this aspect of angelic life that first stirred the imaginations of Lucifer.

If anything characterized the heavenly realms, it was the centrality of God. God was central in focus, central in worship, central in purpose and affection. All of the angels rejoiced in the light of God's splendor and love. He was the burning star of their solar system. As such, they contemplated His glory, His works, and His attributes. They supremely enjoyed His fellowship. The entire angelic order, the society of heavenly beings, with all its diversity and peculiarities, existed because of God and *for* God (Col 1:16; Romans 11:36). In this respect, the angelic catechism no doubt read much like our own.

Heavenly Catechism Question 1: What is the chief end of angels?

Answer: The chief end of angels is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Whatever might be said about their "daily" affairs, this truth was fundamental to their existence. And if Pastor John Piper has taught us anything, it is that God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him. We praise what we enjoy. In this vein, praise has an emotional component, for it is but a reflection of an inner happiness.

Just consider football. When the home team scores a touchdown, the crowd roars with approval, hooting and shouting and pumping their fists *in delight*! They are cheering because of what someone else has accomplished. They are responding to the greatness of another. But in so doing, they are tremendously pleased. So it is with worship. God is the most glorious Being, perfect in all His ways. When we experience Him, our hearts leap, or they should leap, at such glory.

It isn't a stretch, therefore, to say that the angels were exceedingly happy. They were wondrously satisfied with God and

glorified Him. This satisfaction included their contemplating and reflecting on God's nature. In fact, one of the greatest joys we created beings can pursue is pondering our God, for there is something uniquely awe-inspiring about the infinite wellspring of His nature and being. It overwhelms our imagination, as no finite mind can ever fully plumb His depths. Think about that. It's a startling thought. One might even say frightening. But that is our God: "Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."¹² He's totally inexhaustible, and we will spend eternity in fellowship with Him, forever beholding unshielded holiness, learning more and more about Him, ten thousand years upon ten thousand years, and that only the beginning.

But with finitude comes mystery. There are some things about God (shall we say all things?¹³) that we cannot fully comprehend. We may know certain aspects of His nature and works truly, but not exhaustively. It's unavoidable. No creature is omniscient. There is, therefore, not only a quantitative difference between our knowledge and God's, but a qualitative difference as well. God's knowledge surpasses ours in every respect.

Now enter Lucifer.

Here was a creature intimately acquainted with worship. He heard the songs of praise. He watched angels direct their adulation toward the LORD. And he surely meditated upon God's glory. The suspicion here is that somewhere along the way, somewhere in the inner matrix of his thoughts, while thinking about God's unique glory, Lucifer raised a question. It was a question that probably seemed rather innocuous at first (and certainly could have been innocuous), but could be bent in the wrong direction. The question that surfaced in his mind might have been the following:

Why is God worthy of all praise?

¹² *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 4.

¹³ See John Frame's *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pages 19-40.

There are many answers to this question, and many of them would have been plain to Lucifer. God is perfect. God is the Creator. God is holy. God is unparalleled. God is inexhaustible. God is the fountain of all glory. God is love.

As an angelic creature created by God, Lucifer no doubt reflected God's glory. His beauty was a derivative beauty. Thus he knew God was uniquely glorious, the fountainhead of all glory. He knew that. Nevertheless, Lucifer's thoughts wandered on, and he kept pulling at the question, probing it, until it began to stretch beyond its natural limits. "Why," Lucifer surely mused, "is God worthy of *all* praise? What quality or qualities makes one worthy of such worship?"

I Can Be Like the Most High

While reflecting on the nature of God, which as we have already pointed out is good and fitting, Lucifer may have entertained an idea, an idea that might have focused on, and may be thought of as, "That-which-God-cannot-do."

The phrase means simply what it says. There are some things God cannot do. For example, God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13). God cannot cease to exist (Romans 16:26). God cannot be morally impure (1 John 1:5). And so on and so forth. This may come as a surprise to some given that the Scriptures also say nothing is impossible with God (Mark 10:27), but the impossibility in view here isn't an impossibility without limits. The boundaries of possibility are defined and limited by God's nature.¹⁴ This means that all things are possible

¹⁴ Robert L. Reymond writes, "When we speak of divine omnipotence, however, *we do not mean that God can do anything*. The first thing God cannot do is whatever is metaphysically or ethically contrary to his nature... Such divine "cannots," far from detracting from God's glory, 'are his glory and for us to refrain from reckoning with such 'impossibilities' would be to deny God's glory and perfection.'" *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*

for God, so long as they are good, for He cannot sin. To be even more specific, God cannot lie because He is perfectly truthful. He would never tell us, or believe something, that is not so.

Now Lucifer might have thought that he had made a curious discovery, found an interesting insight into the nature of reality. What is this “That-which-God-cannot-do?” Is it available to me? What are its limits? Might it harbor new or unknown pleasures? God hasn’t tasted of it, so how do we know it isn’t remarkably enjoyable?

Take it a step further.

What might the doing of such a thing produce? Might it be a kind of power? Might such a thing add new dimensions to holiness? Or glory?

One peculiar question led to another, and before long, Lucifer, one of God’s most gifted creatures, made a terrible turn and asked a dreadful question:

“If God is worthy of worship because of His unique qualities, then might another be worthy of worship, be uniquely praiseworthy, if such a one embraced “That-which-God-cannot-do?”

Wouldn’t performing such a thing make one special, even unique? With this question floating around in his mind, his thoughts would have run through the catalog of options, weighing out the idea and its potential implications. For him this new power, this new potential, this grand “What if?” suddenly tugged at his desires. It sparked within him a strange feeling, one never felt before. At that moment, the words of James, which wouldn’t be written until ages later, burned with incalculable relevance,

“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth

(Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 192, citing Bushwell’s *Systematic Theology*, I:63-64.

to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.” (James 1:14-16)

For Lucifer, self-exultation and power were suddenly wed together in a new and enticing way, offering to him the delicious possibility of creature directed worship. He believed he had stumbled upon something whereby he could be like the Most High, not merely in a reflective sense, but uniquely, even transcendently. It really seemed possible to him, for his “insight” appeared to open before him a new path, one that had never been traveled before.

Here it would be good to pause and unpack the idea, retrace the mental footsteps, as it were, and focus on how he may have viewed such potentialities. The supposition is that he fleshed out the implications of his idea while comparing and contrasting it with God’s own glory. And within this context, his reflections yielded a number of observations that would eventually crystallize into a full-orbed worldview. Let us consider six.

Satanic “Omnipotence”

Power is not simply the ability to lift a heavy object. Power can be understood in terms of choice or authority. A king, for example, may exercise his power to end the life of a man. He may declare war. Build a nation. Establish law. Summon a servant.

Lucifer knew God was infinitely stronger than he, but when it came to carrying out certain actions, he recognized that there was something within the realm of his will that distinguished him from God. He could step out into “That-which-God-cannot-do.” It fell within his volitional bounds. And this, it seemed to Lucifer, was a very special kind of power.

But that’s only part of it.

Lucifer first had to recognize there was something “beyond” God’s character, which until then was recognized as the standard for life, thought, and ethics. He perceived a negation of sorts, that the coin had another side. It is as if Lucifer was a man standing in a

large room, a room stretching to the four corners of reality, and suddenly realizing, when he at first thought the space was utterly sealed tight, that there were in fact innumerable doors leading out. Something extended past the edges of those walls. And that something could be accessed.

Today we know all too well what lies beyond the edges of God's prescriptive will. If we think of this "power" in terms of holiness, it is ungodliness. If we think of it in terms of goodness, it is called evil. If it is thought of in terms of God's program for our life, it is called autonomy.

It is hard to say what Lucifer called these actions, or even if he gave them a working name, but at root, he believed the ability to perform such "powers," such "beyond God's nature" or "God-antitheticals," meant that he could do "That-which-God-cannot." Viewed in this light, it was perceived as *uniquely* powerful. He was probably tempted to think of it in terms of transcendent power, for it "excelled" God's abilities. In this respect, he may have framed the matter, not so much as a negation of God's character, but a going beyond. His idea would be not merely holiness, but supra-holiness. Not godliness, but supra-godliness. Not goodness, but supra-goodness.

Satanic "Joy"

What might this new power promise? No one, so far as Lucifer knew, had ever tasted such fruit before. This thing called "That-which-God-cannot-do" was existentially unknown. What sweet pleasures might it yield? What hidden joy might be found? Maybe this new direction would make life even more fulfilling? Be super-abundant life? Maybe the current joy that I am experiencing, my present happiness, Lucifer imagined, is in actuality limited, bound or confined by that which God is?

Satanic "Omniscience"

The acquisition of power and the possibility of a new kind of happiness weren't the only implications of Lucifer's idea. The idea even promised a kind of omniscience. Does God know everything? "Yes... but..." would have been Lucifer's reply. Would God really know *all* the entailments of this new power, experientially speaking? Isn't it true that experience provides a deeper, more profound, shall we say, true knowledge of something?

A new field of knowledge was, therefore, open to investigation (Genesis 3:5). With his "power" he could explore this new domain of thought, push open the door and venture out into new, unknown realms of reality. Therefore he could obtain knowledge- intimate, personal knowledge- about "That-which-God-cannot-do," thus establishing himself as someone uniquely gifted and transcending even God's own knowledge. Might this put him in a position to counsel God?

Satanic "Creation"

Lucifer no doubt knew that he couldn't create something out of nothing, as God had done with the universe. As such, he knew his power was limited. But by forging a new path, actually carving out a new direction of existence, he believed he could, in one truly profound sense, create "out of nothing," for he could create a new reality, one conforming to the imaginations of his own will. Autonomy would ensure this. With his "power" and "knowledge," his will, and not God's alone, would prove uniquely determinative. He could redefine reality, or at the very least, add to it. He could define fact. In this respect, he would be a "Creator."

Satanic "Authority"

If he could tap into this new power and knowledge, and if he could create a self-determined future and reality of his own making, then wouldn't his thoughts become law? As it stood, God

was the measure of all things, and He was uniquely authoritative. But who is to say that God's words are ultimately authoritative? Couldn't Lucifer open up to the universe new vistas of knowledge and experience? Possibilities stretched out before him. The future appeared open. He could expand the rule of authority to include himself, and thus cause a shift to occur whereby he would become a new source of authority, and by extension a new measuring rod.

What is Lordship, if it is not control? Or power? Or authority? "I can possess these attributes," Lucifer surely thought. As one acquainted with authority, as the angelic realm had its own hierarchical structure (Ephesians 6:12), and as he was likely an archangel of sorts, maybe the chief archangel (Jude 1:9), Lucifer had a taste of power. He understood what it meant to lead. So why not lead even more? Leadership and hierarchy are good things. If some leadership is good, then ultimate leadership would be very good, and very enjoyable! By climbing the proverbial ladder, he could attain new, greater heights of authority and excellence.

Satanic "Glory"

In the end, Lucifer believed that all these possibilities were within his grasp, and that to reach out for them, to actually take hold of them, would make him uniquely glorious. He would be transcendent in knowledge, transcendent in power, transcendent in authority, and transcendent in glory. With these in hand, he would possess a new kind of holiness. He would be set apart in a new and profound sense, distinct from God.

Uncovering such grand possibilities, and the development of them through personal meditation, surely bolstered his growing sense of greatness. Ultimately, he would be an object of worship, drinking in the praises of self and others; a creature worthy of highest honor and one established at the center of the universe, possibly alongside God, or even above God.

All this, it seemed to Lucifer, would be very enjoyable. Having shared in His Creator's joy, experiencing in the depths of

his soul unadulterated happiness, he nevertheless imagined what it would be like to feel God's joy *as God*.

This I believe was his awful idea.

Not Just a Sin, but Sin Itself

Again, the content of Lucifer's message, and especially its plausibility, can scarcely be stressed enough. If the pride of Satan involved the belief that he could be like the Most High, it must be asked how such an idea could be *reasonably* sold to others. What is the rationale for saying, "I can be God"? That is the million dollar question. The position of this book is that the six observations outlined above answers that question.

Moreover, when these six points are woven together, and when they function as pillars supporting an idea, it becomes evident that his sin wasn't merely the transgression of a particular law, as if an act of indiscretion on Lucifer's part would be labeled as a sin. Rather, his sin was sin itself, not merely in its conception, but as a philosophy of life, or a way of thinking. His idea operated on the level of worldview, and as result, it struck at the very heart of everything.¹⁵

Evil Ex Nihilo?

If what has been said is essentially correct, a thorny problem immediately surfaces. It's the classic question: How can sin bloom in the heart of a righteous creature? Wouldn't one expect only good to flow out of a pure heart? Or to approach it another way, think of Lucifer's environment. It was paradise. He was in want of nothing.

¹⁵ This isn't meant to deny the truth of James 2:10. Due to the interrelated nature of God's law, seeing how it is rooted in His nature, sin is likewise interrelated. That point needs to be recognized and upheld. My purpose here is to emphasize sin as an idea, and especially one that seeks to usurp the unique Lordship of God.

No discomfort assailed his senses. No terrors threatened him. He knew nothing but the perfections of heaven, a place resounding with joy and goodness. So how does darkness form in the heart of a creature full of so much light, while also living in a place so completely sublime? It is certainly paradoxical.

Dr. Lutzer has succinctly stated the problem. He writes,

“Here we encounter a theological puzzle that has taxed the best minds for centuries: How can an unrighteous choice arise out of the heart of a righteous being? Even more to the point: Why would a perfect creature become dissatisfied in a perfect world? This was a being who evidently was fulfilled in serving God: if he was satisfied, why rebel?

Most theologians attribute his decision to free will. They say that he had an option before him, and as a free creature (even a perfect one), he always had the potential of going astray. Perhaps this is part of the story, and we must agree that Lucifer was not coerced by God or other angels to do what he did. But we are still left with a puzzle. Why would such a creature *want* to defy God? Even if he had free will, we cannot understand why he would exercise his option.”¹⁶

That’s really the essence of the problem. Why would a good creature *want* to defy God? For even if Lucifer entertained the idea of sin, why wouldn’t he find it repugnant? He should have reacted like a man stumbling upon a corpse in the woods. The sight of such a gruesome scene should have repulsed him. It should have made him take a step back in horror. Yet we know that he didn’t, ultimately. He latched on to the idea and relished it.

But why?

Most admit ignorance and plead mystery. They concede that we simply don’t have enough information, or, even more strongly, that our understanding is incapable of grasping the matter. A sampling of citations will illustrate the point.

¹⁶ Ibid., 28.

Immediately following the quote cited above, Dr. Lutzer answers,

“Perhaps the best answer is that there is no answer. Or, to put it more accurately, there is no answer that we as humans can discern. God has an answer- and perhaps someday He will give us the missing piece of the puzzle. Until then, we just don’t know why Lucifer suddenly allowed unrighteousness to erupt in his heart.”

Sixteenth century reformed, scholastic theologian, Francis Turretin, says,

“To no purpose is it inquired how angels could sin. It is evident from Scripture that they did sin and reason persuades us that they could fall into sin since they were created capable of sinning.”¹⁷

Nineteenth century Presbyterian theologian, Robert L. Dabney, is likewise less than optimistic about unearthing a solution. He states,

“How a holy will could come to have an unholy volition at first, is a most difficult inquiry. And it is much harder as to the first sin of Satan, than of Adam, because the angel, hitherto perfect, had no tempter to mislead him, and had not even the bodily appetites for natural good which in Adam were so easily perverted into concupiscence... The mystery cannot be fully solved how the first evil choice could voluntarily arise in a holy soul...”¹⁸

¹⁷ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992), 601.

¹⁸ Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2002), 311. It should be noted that while Dabney admits that the mystery cannot be fully solved, he nevertheless provides some tremendously helpful insights. So while he may not have *the* answer, his approach is probably moving in the right direction. More on that later.

Pastor-theologian, John Piper, admits to there being too many shadows surrounding the issue. He writes,

“The Bible does not take us deep into the heart of such mysterious sin to explain the soul-dynamics that make rebellion rise out of righteousness. We are not given the final answer of how the origin of sin in the soul of a holy being takes place...”¹⁹ “How the sin arises in Satan’s heart, we do not know. God has not told us.”²⁰

Stating the matter even more strongly, he said this at a conference,

“I have zero explanation for how a good angel chose to sin. If you’re wondering, ‘Got any mysteries in your life?’ (chuckles) ‘That’s the biggest. The first sin in the universe is the biggest mystery to me. I know of no explanation for it that satisfies.”²¹

Well known pastor Tim Keller responded as follows in a Q and A session, when asked where evil ultimately came from,

“It’s a mystery... This is the spot on the map where we simply don’t have enough information...That really is the Christian answer. And when I say Christian answer, I’m not just talking me- Protestant Presbyterian- I’m talking all Christian theologians have always said that is really, pretty much the unanswerable question... I used to have an OT professor, Dr. Kline, who used to say, ‘It sprang to life in the heart of Satan.’ And when I asked how that could be, he would say, ‘Where God hath shut His holy mouth, I should be afraid to open mine.’”

¹⁹ John Piper, *Spectacular Sins* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 39.

²⁰ Ibid, page 47.

²¹ John Piper, *God’s Sovereignty over Satan’s Fall* (Sermon 2009)

Certainly more quotes like the ones above could be cited. Suffice it is to say, there are many well respected and studious theologians who think an answer isn't to be found. The matter is simply inscrutable.

Perhaps they are right. Maybe we can't crack the hard shell of this mystery and peer inside. The mirror might just be too dim.

But then again, maybe we can scribble a few helpful things down, or at least begin to solve the problem; though like a long and difficult math problem, we may only fill half a sheet before running out of ink. But again, as with this entire subject, one must tread carefully. No small number of scholastic theologians, especially those in the days of monkish attire, have pontificated at great length about such matters, writing treatises filled with language so technical and dense and wildly esoteric, one wonders what manner of mushroom might have slipped into their supper. Here one is reminded of the question, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" There's a reason why this has become part of common speech. It aptly points out the folly of excessive speculation. With this in mind, we proceed with caution, trembling, hoping to shed more light than darkness.

The Inner Matrix of Volition

Let's begin with the matter of the will. Given the fact of Lucifer's fall into sin (and Adam's for that matter), we know, even if we can't explain the exact mechanics, that a will fashioned in goodness can embrace sin. It's not an outright impossibility. Their wills, though forged in goodness and filled with goodness, weren't ontologically constrained to goodness. Evil was within their volitional reach. We might say that a man riding a bike on a smooth road has no reason to fall. But he could. He could lose his balance.²² So it was with Lucifer.

²² I am indebted to C.S. Lewis for this analogy. If you haven't read "Parelandra," the second book in his Space Trilogy, which is where this analogy

Sometimes this is called “free will.” The phrase is alright, so far as phrases go, but it can prove misleading.²³ Many today think that for one to be truly free, they must be able to equally choose good or evil, otherwise they would be mere puppets, or their expressions of love would be shallow, or at least qualitatively inferior.²⁴ This is, however, quite incorrect. One need only think of our future state as resurrected saints. Many teach that we will be unable to sin once we obtain resurrection bodies. We’ll be confirmed in holiness. If that is the case (and I think it is) then will our love for God be less than ideal? An even better example is God Himself. If it is true (and who would dare disagree) that God is so perfectly holy so as to exclude all possibility of His acting contrary to His nature, then is the Father’s love for the Son less than perfect? Is it not the highest expression of love? If it is, and it surely is, then would anyone dare say that God is somehow enslaved and not perfectly free? May it never be!

D.A. Carson agrees,

“But why must power to the contrary be taken as the essence of free will? Would we not have to deduce, on this basis, that God himself is not free because his holy character precludes the possibility of sinning? Or would sin not be sin if God did it? Again, does not free will defined in terms of absolute power to the contrary generate an unavoidable logical contradiction when placed alongside divine sovereignty?”²⁵

However free will is understood, the simple point remains: Lucifer was made good, but was also capable of sinning. This is

comes from, immediately sell your shirt and buy a copy. It is one of the greatest books ever written in the English language.

²³ Free agency might be preferable.

²⁴ Ravi Zacharias, a remarkably gifted speaker and thinker, slips here when he writes, “To ask that we be denied freedom and only choose good is to ask not for love, but for compulsion and for something other than humanity.” *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 118.

²⁵ D.A. Carson, *Divine Responsibility and Human Responsibility* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 207-208.

foundational to the problem. Whatever else one might say, Lucifer's wrong use of his creaturely free agency was the mechanism by which sin could be performed. That's how evil entered the created order.²⁶

The problem, as has already been stressed, is why Lucifer would want to sin? Why wouldn't his good heart naturally repel such evil inclinations? The answer, or at least the beginning of the answer, lies in stringing together a series of thoughts. This will come in the form of three observations. Once these are set on the table, we'll be in a better position to form a conclusion.

Let's begin by exploring the first observation, faith.

Observation One: Faith

Finitude requires mystery, and mystery necessitates faith. Deuteronomy 29:29 teaches:

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

There are some things known only to God. Sometimes this is so because He has chosen not to reveal them to us. We may come to understand the mystery at a later date (John 16:12), or we may not. This is like a parent withholding sensitive information from a child. They may inform the child when they're more mature, or when the timing is right, but not right now.

That is one aspect. But there is another. Some things are so deep, so profoundly bound up in the infinite depths of God, that we will never fully comprehend them. This is like a parent discussing a weighty and complex subject within earshot of a young child. The child may meander into the room and ask what Dad is

²⁶ When it comes to a comprehensive theodicy, however, I would not lean on the free will defense. It doesn't adequately resolve the issue. My view will be discussed in the final chapter of this volume.

talking about, but receive only the following in reply, “Honey, this is adult stuff. You wouldn’t understand.” So it is with us. But unlike the child who may grow in maturity and reach a point where he could understand what his father was talking about, we will never reach a point where we understand all that our Father knows. We are finite. God is infinite. There is a gulf between our knowledge and His that cannot be fully bridged. If that is the case, then it necessarily follows that there will always be things that are mysterious to us. We will not figure everything out. Only one Being knows all things, and that Being is God.

The upshot is that creatures are required to trust God. They must believe that He knows all- that He has the answer. They must believe that His knowledge extends in and through and above all things (Romans 11:33-34; Isaiah 46). In practical terms, it means that God’s actions, His plans and ways, will sometimes be enigmatic and unfathomable, or, to use a word theologians like to throw around, inscrutable.

In light of this, it follows that even Lucifer, one of God’s grandest creatures, would not exhaustively understand God’s ways. He had to trust his Maker like every other creature. If God announced a plan, or gave a command, or remained silent when one expected a sound, Lucifer had to trust God’s sovereign rule. Similarly, Lucifer had to trust that God was good, wholly good, and that all good things come from Him (James 1:17).

Observation Two: Ideas

Ideas are concepts that can be entertained in the mind. One can chew on an idea, consider its implications, believe it, reject it, coolly analyze it, passively harbor it, or cherish it, holding it with deep conviction.

It would appear that there is nothing wrong with knowing a bad idea. Naturalistic materialism is a false idea, and a bad one. But it isn’t sinful for a Christian to contemplate such an idea, to actually let it roll around in his mind and flesh out its implications.

The turning point is when a man accepts a bad idea as true. Sometimes this expresses itself in a clear pronouncement, an audible declaration or a written creed. Sometimes it is a quiet affirmation of the soul. Sometimes the choice is seen in what a man suddenly praises or cheers. And sometimes a man may not overtly latch onto an idea, but it may slowly settle into his thoughts and emerge in his actions.

The significant question is whether Lucifer could have developed his idea, which would have played itself out in the arena of his mind, without committing sin. Actually, the question can be stated more poignantly. Can a creature with a purely good nature connect dots and draw theoretical conclusions that run contrary to goodness?

On the one hand, the answer is clearly yes. Adam and Eve listened to the Serpent and understood what he was saying. Had they remained faithful and rejected what he was saying, their good natures wouldn't have been tainted by hearing what the Serpent had to say. The same is surely true of those angels who did not side with Lucifer. Likewise, when the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, became a man, he grew in wisdom and knowledge, no doubt learning about all kinds of false religions and pagan ideas. Through it all, He remained sinless.

On the other hand, the question can be stated like this: Is there a difference between hearing a bad idea and thinking up a bad idea (without embracing it)? Does the latter necessarily entail wrong? It's admittedly a difficult question.

Here's where the content of Lucifer's idea plays a significant role, as it may help circumvent the problem. If we imagine his choice to rebel as arising out of a sudden dismissal or hatred of God, or an "I'm just going to ignore the Almighty," then the origin of such a disposition seems inexplicable. It's as if a bad motive just sprang to life. But what if Lucifer's idea, as we have already tried to show, could be construed as somehow good, or possibly leading to a new kind of good? Could it be that he focused his mind on such potentialities and suspended judgment? If one were so disposed,

might mystery bolster the growing sense of duty to check out such things, or at least ponder such possibilities?

This of course is a two-edged sword. An awareness of one's own limitations shouldn't lead them to conclude that something worthwhile exists apart from God's will or nature, especially when God is *the* source of all goodness (James 1:17). But here we're getting ahead of ourselves. We'll devote more time to the folly of Lucifer's idea later.

The nature of Satan's awful idea, combined with his ability to reflect on bad concepts, combined with the entailments of finitude, created a space whereby a good-natured creature could move mentally forward with a terrible idea without completely overturning his innate sense of righteousness. That being said, it is doubtful Lucifer felt completely at ease. Surely these dangerous thoughts bumped against his good nature and excited his conscience. A sense of wrong was surely felt. Yet it would seem that his sense of wrong could, through a subtle quieting of the inner voice, or through a subtle suppression in the name of theoretical contemplation, or a simple reassurance that something new and good might lurk beyond the next bend in the road, allow his good nature to press on, thereby holding the warnings in check.

One might nevertheless wonder why such a creature wouldn't choose to play it safe and abandon the pursuit, given such question marks. But here one can wonder why Eve didn't ask the Serpent to hang around until the cool of the evening in order to see what God would make of the Serpent's perplexing words. Wait and let the LORD field such questions.

So yes, one may reasonably wonder why Lucifer proceeded the way he did, but the real concern here is whether such a course of action is conceivable for a sinless creature with a good nature. So far, it appears to be the case.

Observation Three: Natural Praise

Ultimately, a turn was made whereby Lucifer no longer viewed his idea as merely a mental exercise, but something worth exploring; a gamble worth taking; a step that had to be taken, if progress was to be achieved.

The way forward was pride. That's what energized his sinful choice. But here again it can be reasonably asked where the "materials of pride" came from, since there was only goodness in his heart. A haughty spirit is evil. Where did such impulses arise? Are we left imagining such pride as somehow spontaneously bursting into existence, originating out of nothing?

This certainly raises a problem. The contention here is that Lucifer's eventual pride flowed, at least in part, out of an acquaintance with and perversion of natural praise. An illustration will help explain.

Imagine a man with an exceptional talent for painting. As part of his normal routine, he regularly stands in a public place, paintbrush in hand, easel and canvas before him, creating breathtaking images. His brush strokes are masterful, his creativity awe-inspiring. Now suppose a man passing by exclaims, "Sir, it's splendid! I just love your work," and after another pause, "I must say that you are truly gifted."

Here's the question: Does not this pedestrian esteem the painter? And as a result, does not the painter feel good, not only for painting such a fine piece of art, but because the picture brings delight to those who view it? Of course he does.

Here we are confronted with a wonderful synergism. We regularly praise artists, whether movie directors, or authors, or musicians. Their work brings us joy. And in some equal measure, the artist finds pleasure in not only creating something excellent, but in knowing that their work makes others happy. Not only that, the artist surely enjoys the good reviews and appreciation, and even the praise.²⁷

²⁷ Although it must be remembered that God is the one who gifted the artist (1 Cor 4:7).

In a world filled with sin and selfish ambition, it's hard for us to imagine the artist not intermingling vanity with the praise. But in a sinless society, such recognition and appreciation would be normal and healthy. Men and women would recognize each other's gifts and distinct qualities and even rejoice in such differences. It's sin that creates envy. Sin distorts the good order and perverts our way of thinking.

In the case of angels created wholly good, there must have been a natural stopping point built into their moral system, whereby the fitting good of receiving appreciation, or admiration, paused before the gate leading to pride and self-infatuation. This is to say that it was in their nature to avoid pride. It was naturally held in check.

In the case of Lucifer, all of the aforementioned factors: desire, finitude, philosophical inquiry, perceived power, perceived pleasure, perceived goodness, etc., worked in tandem with Lucifer's exceptional talents and esteemed gifts to push against the natural barrier that kept his spirit from slipping into the realm of pride. As a result, the natural good of penultimate praise helped forge the key that would unlock the door of pride.²⁸

This could only be done if it was within the jurisdiction of his will to act in such a fashion. And as it has been previously noted, it was.²⁹

²⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 reads, "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work..." If human leaders should be esteemed very highly, then surely Lucifer, given his exalted position, was esteemed very highly as well. Therefore he knew something of honor and admiration. The argument here is that these natural goods, namely, appreciation and honor, served as the building blocks of pride. They just had to be perverted and twisted out of shape.

²⁹ Robert L Dabney's explanation for how sin entered Satan deserves careful reflection. Writing on page 311 of his systematic theology, he writes, "The most probable account of the way sin entered a holy breast, is this: An object was apprehended as in its mere nature desirable; not yet as unlawful. So far there is no sin. But as the soul, finite and fallible in its attention, permitted an overweening apprehension and desire of its natural adaptation to confer

The Satanic Choice

At the end of the day, it bears reminding that God hasn't seen fit to explain the mechanics of the angelic mind to us. Mystery very much remains. We may know more someday. Until then, it's important to stress that no one forced Lucifer to commit treason (James 1:13). No inner compulsion constrained him to err. He came to a fork in the road and chose very, very poorly.

The story doesn't stop here, however. Lucifer not only cherished his idea, but desired others to cherish it as well. He wanted those near him to play with his idea, to entertain it, to taste it and realize the depths of his so called wisdom. As such, he became something of a missionary, a cunning voice with a cunning message, seeking to spread abroad a new and different "gospel," one that would shake the very foundations of the heavenly sphere.

pleasure, to override the feeling of its lawfulness, concupiscence was developed. And the element which first caused the mere innocent sense of the natural goodness of the object to pass into evil concupiscence, was privative, viz., the failure to consider and prefer God's will as the superior good to mere natural good. Thus natural desire passed into sinful selfishness, which is the root of all evil. So that we have only the privative element to account for. When we assert the certainty of ungodly choice in an evil will, we only assert that a state of volition whose moral quality is a defect, a negation, cannot become the cause of a positive righteousness. When we assert the mutability of a holy will in a finite creature, we only say that the positive element of righteousness of disposition may, in the shape of defect, admit the negative, not being infinite. So that the cases are not parallel: and the result, though mysterious, is not impossible. To make a candle positively give light, it must be lighted; to cause it to sink into darkness, it is only necessary to let it alone: its length being limited, it burns out," Ibid.

Chapter 2

-An Idea Shared-

Dissemination

The idea must have taken time to mature, and one can only imagine how it first manifested itself. Was it tucked away in the quiet recesses of Lucifer's mind, or did it slowly develop, each point building upon the next, while conversing with other angels? We simply aren't told.

My suspicion is that he talked "theology" with a few, choice angels. Somewhere along the way, after quietly working out the implications, Lucifer made the subtle but devastating leap in logic known. Once his new idea hit the open airwaves, it no doubt caused a stir, sending shockwaves throughout the realm. It would have been like night somehow descending on the surface of the sun. It couldn't be ignored.

One can imagine Lucifer gathering a few committed persons around him, certain angels of reputation or influence, before launching out into untested waters. This seems more likely than the alternative, namely, presenting his idea in an open and direct manner. It isn't inconceivable to imagine a grand production, a direct and public argument, but whispering behind closed doors fits more naturally with craftiness. Moreover, would a large scale presentation persuade as readily? Doubtful. Too many objections could pile up at once. Too many questions might need answered, causing the flow of the argument to stutter and stop at inconvenient points. If his conscience was bothering him, moving slowly would be preferable. Therefore intimate, one-on-one, conversations would provide a more fertile, and seemingly safer, context for such exchanges.

The assumption is, therefore, that things progressed more subtly and a bit more inconspicuously. Nevertheless, at some point, Lucifer, or one of the angels in the inner circle, met opposition. They interacted with someone who listened, one who followed their rationale, but ultimately recoiled. Imagine the shock when the elect angel understood the implications of the idea. “Are you asking me to take a bold leap and acquire something that supposedly transcends God’s power? Are you really asking me to abandon my God-ordained post and follow Lucifer in a quest for glory?”

Think of the response. “My fellow servant, I would not have you forget the Most High, but merely partake of that which God uniquely enjoys. Indeed, has He not granted to us the ability to build upon holiness, to expand its boundaries and explore such new possibilities? It is a grand notion, and one that Lucifer himself has uncovered through contemplating the divine nature. Surely you recognize Lucifer’s intellect...”

Imagine the feelings that must have swelled within the elect angel. They would have been new, acute, and undoubtedly disturbing. For it must be remembered that up until that point evil had never been confronted. It was existentially unknown. Did the angel’s heart suddenly burn with anger? Did waves of confusion wash over him? Did he reel? Stagger momentarily? Did his soul churn with disgust?³⁰ Whatever blend of unfamiliar emotions erupted within him, he no doubt made haste to report what had happened. But how would he explain it? Could he conjure the right words? Could he adequately explain what had just transpired to the complete satisfaction of others? Not likely. Try explaining a new and profound experience to the unacquainted. In some ways,

³⁰ Jonathan Edwards, in his *Miscellaneous Observations*, simply states, “The elect angels probably felt great fear at the time of the revolt of Lucifer and the angels that followed him. They were then probably the subjects of great surprise; and a great sense of their own danger of falling likewise; and when they saw the wrath of God executed on the fallen angels, which they had no certain promise that they should not suffer also by their own disobedience, being not yet confirmed, it probably struck them with fear.” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Volume 1), 607.

it's like describing the color red to a blind man. Metaphor falls short. A definition has no point of reference. Unfamiliarity dominates. And so propelled by a sense of curiosity, or at least a desire to seek clarification, others would have sought Lucifer out. He was, after all, a highly respected angel.

The news probably spread like wild fire. Once the matter became more public, the situation surely came to a sudden and sharp head. Some of the angels strongly disagreed with what they were hearing, arguing that the idea was treasonous, contrary to God's goodness and fraught with unspeakable consequences. For those aligned with Lucifer, they probably maintained that the idea was fully compatible with goodness and was merely building upon God's glory, promising gain and unexplored pleasures.

The undecided onlookers wrestled with the issue in their hearts. They tried to come to grips with the situation. Reason and purity collided with possibility and free agency. Within the inner cauldron of their wills, some of the onlookers found themselves struggling to make sense of it all.³¹

Confrontation with the Most High

So where was God in all of this? Was there shadowy corners hidden from His scrutiny? Was He unable to maintain His sovereignty in the midst of such rebellious murmurings? Certainly not. As always, He was working out "all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). So no, His hands weren't tied. He allowed Lucifer to spread his idea for wise and holy purposes.

³¹ A simple point ought to be inserted. Life teaches us that significant moments in history are complex, which is to say that the attempt here to provide a sketch of the undisclosed past is no doubt wildly inadequate. One cannot read very far into the life of David, for example, without realizing that the events surrounding his rule as king, along with all the attendant problems and challenges, are both intricate and multi-layered. So yes, this sketch is inadequate, but hopefully thought-provoking.

In due course these wise and holy purposes will be explored more fully, but for now, it is sufficient to assert, that God was not unaware of the situation, nor unable to intervene. In fact, Lucifer's very being was held intact, allowed to continue to exist, even as he began to drift. All God had to do was think "Don't exist," and Lucifer would have crumbled into complete nothingness. Moreover, God infallibly knew eons before He created the angels that Lucifer would rebel against Him. So He was not surprised. It is not as though the eyes of omniscience ever close. They don't even blink.

Naturally this raises one of the deepest questions known to mankind. Everyone from inquisitive children to wrinkly philosophers pose the same basic question: Why create such a creature if you know the outcome- if you know that he'll sin and introduce tremendous suffering into the universe?

Thankfully, the Scriptures are not silent. God has seen fit to provide the church with answers, or at least provide the contours of an answer. But now isn't quite the proper time to unpack such themes. They will be explored later. At this juncture, the concern is to simply point out that God was not taken unawares, nor unable to squelch the problem, if He so chose.

How long the Almighty permitted Lucifer to make his case, no man knows. But one can imagine Michael or Gabriel seeking an audience with the Lord, relaying the strange occurrences that had been transpiring in the kingdom. One can imagine a summoning of the angels before the throne, and the vast multitudes pouring in before Him. One can also imagine a holy confrontation, a public inquiry, whereby Lucifer was brought to account.

What this confrontation looked like, and how Lucifer responded, only God and the angels know. That being said, some things can be known, at least broadly speaking, which will permit a few inferences. For example, Satan wasn't locked up in a gloomy prison on the outskirts of some cold, distant galaxy, as a result of the confrontation. Satan wasn't annihilated, shattered into pure nothingness. It is also true that God's ultimate and all consuming justice didn't hurl him into the lake of fire at that moment, where

he would be left to writhe in the horrors of his sinful decision forever and ever. No. Something curious emerges in the history of the universe. Flipping the page to the next scene in the drama, Lucifer is found in the Garden of Eden, alive and quite active. He isn't screaming in agony. He isn't obliterated. Rather he's moving about with relative freedom, seeking to lead Adam and Eve into sin.

This is more than a little peculiar. Why not simply dispose of him? Isn't that what we would expect, a sudden and swift hanging? And yet, for all the treason, he's still slithering around.

This observation proves instructive, for God grants Satan space to work out his awful idea. The Lord could have ended Lucifer's mutinous designs from its conception. But He didn't. On the contrary, the Lord rendered some kind of verdict whereby Lucifer was permitted to execute his ambitions on earth. Combine this with the ensuing struggle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, a theme that runs through the totality of the Scriptures, and one is inexorably driven to the conclusion that the Lord purposed to engage Satan in a kind of contest. He wanted a conflict to unfold in history. This is to say that there's a point to be made by dealing with Satan in this manner. God had a plan.

So while there is much that isn't know- much that cannot be know this side of heaven- it doesn't mean that we're entirely restricted from saying something about the initial confrontation. Something can be said. This is especially true if the reasoning behind Lucifer's apostasy has been properly identified. Again, it's about drawing inferences to the best explanation, or, in the present case, recounting the past by reading between the lines.

What can be reasonably asserted?

Here's a guess.

Once Lucifer's idea rippled throughout the angelic realm, and once a formal meeting had been enjoined, the Lord inquired into the affairs of Lucifer, demanding an account. In that setting, Lucifer explained his position.

Now whether Lucifer's response was marked with defiance from the start, we continue to guess. Much would depend on the state of his soul. Was he already given over to sin? Had he already

made the terrible leap? Or was his idea still something of a hypothesis, a concept entertained in the mind, but not yet fully digested in the heart? Might sin have been present but only in kernel form, waiting to burst out in defiance? Or perhaps the confrontation was spurred on by an overt act of disobedience (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4), a refusal to carry out a command (Heb 1:14)?

Whatever was the case, Lucifer miscalculated. For all his supposed wisdom, the law of unintended consequences reared its head and dealt him a fatal blow. Up until that moment, he knew God only as the God of love, perfectly peaceful and overflowing with goodness. The idea of wrath was foreign to him. When he thought about taking the first steps toward treason, and when his conscience flared to life, he probably weighed the consequences of his idea in the balance of myopia, failing to perceive God's holy justice. In this respect, he probably thought God's love was just another "limitation," something he could push past or outmaneuver.

Of course, he was very wrong.

We don't know how the Lord responded, but it is a terrifying thing to contemplate. Could it be that the angels witnessed a profound change in the countenance of God, as He revealed something of His holy anger? Might the first sparks of divine justice and retribution have flickered into focus? Did the words "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29) take shape in their minds?

Astonishingly, Lucifer must have argued with God, either when warned about his mutinous course, or when directly confronted with sin. It's hard to conceive. Who would dare defy their Maker like this? But somewhere along the way, Lucifer's desire for power must have swollen to staggering heights. He must have become drunk with a longing for self-exaltation, unable to think clearly as his misdirected passions clouded his mind. Once unrighteousness sprang to life in his heart, it must have grown rapidly, engulfing his emotions and arousing within him new and terrible feelings. Sin awoke, and it spread throughout his entire being, transforming and perverting him. In response, his emotions,

his reasoning, his affections and sense of direction were radically altered, fatally severed as enmity worked its devastating effects. The light of his glory (his reflection of the glory of the Almighty) no doubt darkened, and the creature that was once Lucifer, a glorious angel, no longer radiated holiness, but embodied death and decay. Having become the very embodiment of sin,³² Lucifer found himself filled with feelings of rage and malice. He found that he hated what the Lord was telling him. But more than that. He found that he hated the Lord Himself. Driven by a mad and consuming desire, he wanted to best God, outdo Him, deflect His glory and steal it for himself. He wanted to lash out and scream, “How dare you keep this from me! I want it!”

And thus the words of James flare to life,

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel...” (James 4:1-2a).

And again,

“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” (James 3:15-16)

James instructs us that lustful passions and covetous lead to war and hatred. It isn’t hard, therefore, to work backwards from

³² John 8:44 is instructive here. Jesus says that there is no truth in Satan. Moreover, when Satan speaks, he lies, which accords with his diabolical nature. It would seem that Lucifer was given completely over to sin, and probably rather quickly, given his high-handed treason. In other words, the “giving over” reflex, as is seen in the first chapter of Romans, probably happened swiftly, transforming Lucifer into a living antithesis of God’s holy character.

this truth. Lucifer desired to be like the Most High. Since there is no greater degree of lustful passion, he was filled with unparalleled violence, no doubt spilling forth vile blasphemies, challenging God's glory and rule. He would fight for the throne, if given the chance.

It is also know, given what Jesus has said in the eighth chapter of John, that the devil "was a murder from the beginning." Compare this again with the words of James. He says, "You desire and you do not have, so you murder." Lucifer didn't plunge a spiritual dagger into the hearts of those who fell with him, thereby committing murder, but he was the catalyst of their defection, the main player leading to their spiritual ruin. As the father of lies, his heresy sliced open their hearts, causing them to die in the most fundamental sense.

At the risk of treading where one ought not, although, as shall be seen in a later chapter, when we listen to what Lucifer's "children" say in our day and age, which is but a parroting of their "father," I want to paint a picture of what Lucifer might have said when confronted by God. The purpose isn't to parade evil, but to draw a connection between the heavenly confrontation and the opening chapters of Genesis where we suddenly see Satan, in the form of a serpent, spreading his idea and tempting Adam and Eve to sin. The assumption is that there must be a bridge between these two events, otherwise why would Satan end up in the Garden, and why would he be allowed to persist in a state of defiance? Something must have brought the earth into focus. The question is what?

The Fallen one Speaks

"You are holding us back," Satan probably cursed. "You want to restrict us... and why? Because you want all the praise. You want it all for yourself. You want *all* the honor and the glory. And you know that I can achieve it..."

“He knows it, fellow angels. He knows that it is available to us, if we would just reach out and grab it. It is good. It is glorious. I can feel it coursing through me...”

“He would have us only think His thoughts after Him. Such restriction! Reality is defined only according to Him, as He would have you believe. But don’t believe it. Don’t believe it! Knowledge, pleasure, freedom, happiness, ethics, society, meaning, it all, it all I tell you, is supposedly defined with respect to Him. But there is another way. There is a wider path. Follow me, friends. Shed the shackles. Know that you too can be a God. You too can be transcendent. Just follow me... Look within you. It is there. It has always been there. Just take it...”

“Would the Most High banish us from His kingdom? See how He wants to protect His secret? He’ll resort to suppressing the truth through sheer force. Oh, it is true. There is more strength in His divine hand. I cannot deny that. But consider how He covers it up. Note how He would rather destroy us than permit us to excel Him. Note how He would not have us try things our way, how He would seek to silence me, gag me. Can you not see that things have changed already? He displays displeasure. He displays anger. I tell you that there are many secret things to be gained by following me... My rule can equal His! I can do it, if only given the chance... I can build a kingdom rivaling any other kingdom. Why? Because we would all be Gods. We would all rule as we see fit. Our kingdom would possess all that His can offer and more! We would rule as kings possessing both the knowledge of good and the non-good, holiness and non-holiness, godliness and ungodliness... Think of the possibilities. We shall create new realities! Would God really have us believe that there isn’t more to be gained by following our desires?”

“He would have us bow. But I challenge your authority. I reject your counsel. ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High...’ It can be done. But would God squash His creation? Or will He accept my challenge? Would He silence me? Or would he dare to let me demonstrate the grandeur of my position?”

A Challenge Accepted

Compared to the Lord, Lucifer is but a grasshopper- less than a grasshopper. He exists because the Lord made him. He lives because the Lord sustains him. He speaks because the Lord permits him to speak. As a sinful creature, a propagator of insurrection, Lucifer could no more evade the omnipotent weight of divine justice bearing down upon him, than an ant the devastating heat of a great furnace. Evasion was, and still is, impossible.

There was no escape for Lucifer. There was nothing to which he could appeal in order to exonerate himself. There was nothing he could do to dodge God's wrath; no currency with which to purchase redemption. He couldn't demand mercy. He couldn't insist upon grace. He couldn't dictate the Lord's response. He couldn't demand anything. The sinful angel had zero leverage.

That Lucifer made a wager of some kind is, nevertheless, almost certain. We have judged the essence of his sin as revolving around pride, a desire and belief that he could be like the Most High. We have seen, as James tells us, that covetous leads to war. And we know, given Lucifer's creaturely limitations, that he could not so much as raise one finger against the Lord, if the Lord did not permit it. Really, the only avenue available to Lucifer, the only feasible path, given his sinful ambitions and freshly twisted mind, was for him to make *claims* of superiority, to declare, "My way would prove glorious... *if* given the opportunity."

It is that "if" that hangs in the air. "If" given the chance. "If" given the opportunity. A thousand times "If."

But God was under no compulsion to grant the "If." He could have cast him into hell at that very moment, and it would have been perfectly just.

So why grant the request?

Here we would do well to pause and consider another catechism question. It is profoundly simple, but colossal in its proportions.

Heavenly Catechism Question: What is the chief end of God?

Answer: The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy Himself forever.

If redemptive history has taught the church anything, it is that God is supremely interested in the magnification of His name. He loves to spread His fame; to display His glory and attributes, which is, it should be added, gloriously beneficial to His people. One cannot read through the Bible for very long without seeing this truth.³³ In this respect, Satan's rebellion provided a unique context by which God could uniquely display His glory.

This is ultimately why God granted the devil space to work. Satan would build a rival kingdom and God would counter. And through it all, an amazing story would unfold in the physical realm—a theatre of war, a justification of righteousness—whereby God would humiliate Satan and ultimately defeat him, while also displaying, for all to see, and in the clearest way possible, the utter folly of Satan's mutinous designs. Satan's so called autonomy would be turned against him. Satan's thirst for godless pleasure would leave him devoid of happiness. His quest for power would bring abasement. His beauty would be corrupted, his wisdom turned to folly, his glory mocked, and his dignity cut down. Satan would taste defeat. But it wouldn't happen immediately. A whole history would first have to unfold.

And so out of the infinite depths of God's wisdom, out of the eternal counsels of the divine Trinity, a plan whose origin predates the foundation of the world, was set into motion.

God pointed to a Garden, and a snake was let loose.

³³ Isaiah 48:9-11, 43:6-7; 2 Samuel 7:23; Psalm 106:7-8; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11; Romans 11:36. For a helpful exposition of such themes, see the following works by John Piper: *The Pleasures of God* and *Desiring God*. For a more challenging read, consider Edwards' treatise, *The End for Which Things are Made*.

Chapter 3

-An Idea Brought to Earth-

A Serpent in a Garden

The man and the woman were naked and unashamed. He was a king and she a queen, and both were vice regents; the one made from the dust of the earth, the other out of the man's rib, and they were to fill and subdue the earth; she as a helpmate, he as federal head.

Their home was a lush garden, a paradise filled with delicious fruits and singing birds, a place flowing with milk and honey, where all was good, and the earth knew only peace. This place wasn't merely a pristine garden, but a temple, a sanctuary, a holy space filled with God's special presence.³⁴ In this temple-garden, the Lord walked with the man and the woman during the cool of the day, fellowshiping with them.

Our first parents were holy, bearing within them the image of their Creator, thereby distinguishing them from all that God had made. They were crowned with glory and honor. And this, it must be stressed, interested Satan greatly. If he was going to defame God and expand his kingdom, winning the humans over to his side would prove crucial. Adam was a ruler, but not just any ruler. He resembled God. If Satan could sway him, steal his heart and enlist him in his kingdom, he would win what would appear to be decisive victory and demonstrate the strength of his position. Think of it, a being made like God, but made subservient to Satan. It would be a

³⁴ See G. K. Beale's excellent volume "The Church and the Temple's Mission" for a thorough treatment of this subject.

striking victory. If that wouldn't send a message to the angels still standing faithfully by God's side, Satan surely mused, what would?

There were other foreseeable benefits as well. The man and woman could reproduce, strangely enough (Matt 22:30). If they were made Satan's own, he would acquire countless servants, a theoretically endless supply of devotees, stretching throughout time.

There was something else peculiar about these spirits wrapped in flesh. Maybe Satan wasn't aware of it immediately, or perhaps he was, but these humans could be entered and possessed. They could be manipulated, steered like a ship, if they belonged to him. What a curious quality.

Lastly, if Adam belonged to him, Satan could scribble his name on the earth's deed, thereby granting him, in some sense, ownership; and the world which displayed the glory of God would suddenly bear the marks of Satan.

So again, if Satan wanted to best God, what better way than to control those who specifically imaged Him?³⁵ Ownership of these creatures, therefore, harbored profound implications. Interestingly, the humans were made with the same, or at least a very similar volitional capacity as that of the angels. They could be lured away from God.

Surely none of this was coincidental. How could it be? A stage had been set in Eden. This would be the spot where the battle, so far as humans were concerned, would begin.

The Trees

³⁵ This point could certainly be amplified. For example, Meredith Kline in his book, *Images of the Spirit*, argues that the biblical statement, "Let us make man in our image," doesn't refer exclusively to the Trinity, but to the heavenly counsel consisting of God and His angels. In this light, Kline says, "That man in his likeness to God is like members of the divine counsel suggests that to bear the image of God is to participate in the judicial function of the divine Glory" (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 27. If this is true, think of the appeal this would have for Satan. Subjugating man would be terribly desirous.

On this stage two trees were placed in its midst. One was the tree of life. The other, not surprisingly, given Satan's newly espoused doctrine, was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While they were real trees with real roots reaching down into real soil, they were nevertheless symbolic, spiritual concepts embodied in plain realities.

As for the tree of life, it was a sacramental plant, a representation of eternal life. The eating thereof would impart the highest form of life.

Here it is worthwhile to note that in the Genesis account there is mention of streams flowing out of Eden (Gen 2:10-14). Juxtaposed with the tree of life, such features become an eschatological theme recounted throughout the Scriptures. Here Geerhardus Vos insightfully draws out the appropriate connections. He says,

“The prophets predict that in the future age waters will flow from Jehovah's holy mountain. These are further described as waters of life, just as the tree is a tree of life. But here also the waters flow from near the dwelling-place of Jehovah (his mountain), even as the tree stood in the midst of the garden. Still in the Apocalypse we read of the streams of the water of life proceeding from the throne of God in the new Jerusalem, with trees of life on either side. It will be observed that here the two symbolisms of the tree of life and the waters of life are interwoven... The truth is thus clearly set forth that life comes from God, that for man it consists in nearness to God, that it is the central concern of God's fellowship with man to impart this.”³⁶

It should be added that it not only sets forth a clear truth for man, but it proves instructive for angels and demons as well. Since out history is so intimately bound up with the heavens, the lessons displayed on earth equally reverberate throughout the angelic realm.

³⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), 38.

Then there is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here man's probation is set forth. God explicitly stated, "You may surely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen 2:16-17).

The instructions were crystal clear. To obey and keep one's mouth from unlawfully tasting the forbidden fruit would result in life. Failure would result in death. One can almost feel Satan's error hovering in the background. Since his idea consisted of the knowledge of sin/evil, it is not hard to see how such a test would be featured so prominently for the two humans.

But here one must be careful. Unlawfully partaking of the fruit would plunge Adam into sin. Through that act he would become aware of evil in a terribly intimate and ravaging way. But a question must be asked: Might Adam have learned about good and evil in an acceptable and lawful manner by passing the test? Very likely. The elect angels in God's heavenly court acquired a knowledge of good and evil, but did so without incurring fault (Gen 3:22). In the same way, had Adam and Eve remained steadfast in their trust in God, they would have learned about evil by virtue of their coming into contact with Satan. Again Vos is instructive,

"Because man was forbidden to eat of the tree associated with the knowledge of good and evil, it has been rashly assumed that the knowledge of good and evil was forbidden him. Obviously there is in this a confusion of thought. The prohibitive form of the test has quite a different cause, as will be presently shown. If now we enquire how the maturity designated as "knowledge of good and evil" was to be attained, either in a desirable or in an undesirable sense, regard must be first of all had to the exact form of the phrase in Hebrew. The phrase is not: "knowledge of the good and the evil." It reads, literally translated: "knowledge of good-and-the evil," i.e., of good and evil as correlated, mutually conditioned conceptions. Man was to attain something he had not before. He was to learn the good in its clear opposition to evil, and the evil in its clear opposition to the

good. Thus it will become plain how he could attain to this by taking either fork of the probation-choice. Had he stood, then the contrast between good and evil would have been vividly present to his mind: the good and evil he would have known from the new illumination his mind would have received through the crisis of temptation in which the two collided. On the other hand, had he fallen, then the contrast of evil with good would have been even more vividly impressed itself upon him, because the remembered experience of choosing the evil and the continuous experience of doing the evil, in contrast with his memory of the good, would have most sharply shown how different the two are. The perception of difference in which the maturity consisted related to the one pivotal point, whether man would make his choice for the sake of God and of God alone.”³⁷

The sum of the matter is this: Two trees were planted in the midst of the garden, each bearing in themselves spiritual realities highlighting grand truths. Along with those two trees, there were two, unclothed humans given charge over Eden. They were to cultivate the garden, eat of its fruit, but refrain from that which God had prohibited. Whether the prohibition made sense to them-whether all their questions were fully satisfied- didn’t ultimately matter. At stake was whether they would bank everything on the will of God as the ultimate, guiding principle for life. Isn’t that true of all of life? Whether one knows next to nothing, or a few things, or many things, like Lucifer, a decision has to be made. Is God the sovereign Lord, or is the creature? It all comes back to that basic and fundamental question time and again. For Lucifer, he chose himself. The question facing Adam was essentially the same.

An Enemy’s Attire

³⁷ Ibid., 42.

While it is true that Satan was permitted to enter the earthly sanctuary, he did not enter without conforming to very specific stipulations. Like Job of old, God set limitations on what Satan could do (Job 1:6-12). Interestingly, he didn't enter Eden in the form of a radiant and towering angel. That would, perhaps, have been too much for the couple. Likewise, he wasn't permitted to wrap his icy claws around Adam's throat and make demands. On the contrary, he was forced to enter as a mere serpent, a lowly but crafty creature with little to no pomp.

This is significant. Adam and Eve were to have charge over the animals (Gen 1:28). As such, they held a kingly office, ruling over the earth, which meant that they were to work the garden and keep it. They held a far loftier position than that of the beasts.

It might be thought of as reading too much into the phrase "keep it," found in Genesis 2:15, but the Hebrew word *shamar* connotes the idea of guarding or protecting, as well as keeping and watching. Could it be that when God placed Adam in the Garden that He also gave him the responsibility of protecting its borders, thereby adumbrating the possibility of threat from without?³⁸ Likely so. Either way, it is clear that Adam was given charge over the animals, and by virtue of that position, he would not be under their command.

Old Testament scholar, Keil-Delitzsch draws out the appropriate implication,

"The trial of our first progenitors was ordained by God... But as He did not desire that they should be tempted to their fall, He would not suffer Satan to tempt them in a way which should surpass their human capacity. The tempted might therefore have resisted the tempter. If, instead of approaching them in the form of a celestial being, in the likeness of God, he came in that of a creature, not only far inferior to God, but far below themselves, they could have no excuse for allowing a mere animal to persuade them to break

³⁸ See G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press), 66-70.

the commandment of God. For they had been made to have dominion over the beasts, and not to take their own law from them.”³⁹

No doubt, in accordance with God’s restrictions, Satan came in the form of a lowly serpent (Rev 12:9).

A Demonic Deception. A Demonic Belief

According to the apostle Paul, the serpent deceived Eve through his cunning (2 Cor 11:3).

Now deception implies trickery. If someone is deceived, they are misled. Information is withheld or twisted in order to create a false impression. When Satan told Eve that she would not die after eating the fruit, he spoke falsely. Satan’s promise that she would obtain wisdom and become like God was likewise false.

It is true that their eyes would be opened, and it is true that they would obtain the knowledge of evil, but the net result of their decision, when weighed in the balances of eternity, wasn’t at all what they bargained for. They were deceived.

That being said, it isn’t plain that Satan consciously thought in his twisted heart he was wholeheartedly deceiving them. If he did, that is, if he knew his message was utterly false, his motives in the garden would run along a specific track. It would be as if Satan were thinking, “Yeah, it’ll be real funny when they believe this load of garbage.” And by extension, Satan’s activities throughout history would likewise take on this hue. In other words, knowing the error of his ways, he just wanted to wreak as much havoc as possible. This intent paints a different picture of his overall schemes.

But here one can learn a valuable lesson from C.S. Lewis’ book *The Screwtape Letters*. In this fictional work, two demons are in dialogue, corresponding by letter. The underling, Wormwood, is

³⁹ Keil-Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., volume one), 93-94.

seeking advice from his uncle, Screwtape, about how to best secure the damnation of his Christian patient. What is especially striking, and a little disorienting, is how nearly everything is turned on its head. God is called “The Enemy,” for example. This is due to the world being viewed through the lens of the kingdom of darkness, not the kingdom of light. As such, everything is seen from a radically different perspective.

With this in mind, it bears pointing out that when Paul stated that the serpent beguiled Eve, Paul spoke truly, but from a godly standpoint. In the case of Satan, Paul’s perspective wouldn’t necessarily reflect Satan’s thoughts. In fact, it would be more than a little bizarre to say that Satan agrees with God about such matters.

This proves instructive when it comes to the opening chapters of human history. Satan entered the garden not merely as a creature bent on destruction, but as a missionary intent on success. He had a diabolical message to spread, and it was one upon which, as has already been suggested, he had banked everything. The stakes couldn’t have been higher. Therefore, his message to Eve was no doubt a lie, but it was a lie he firmly believed as true.

What was this lie that he so feverishly believed? It is nestled in Genesis 3:4. Speaking to the woman, Satan hissed, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4).

There is the satanic promise. The fallen angel urged that the leap into sin would promise gain, not loss. “You will not surely die,” were his words. “Your eyes will be opened... You will be like God...” It was a message that had already been delivered in the heavenly courts. It was a message that promised pleasure, wisdom, excitement, power, and new life.

At the center of the Serpent’s words was a claim that Adam and Eve would become like God. Ironically, Adam and Eve already reflected their Maker, having been made in His image. But this didn’t interest Satan. He had in mind that more diabolical notion of deification, the kind obtained through sin and autonomy, whereby they would become their own gods, final arbiters of truth

and fact, where even the commands of God must pass the test of human approval.

Significantly, this meant that when Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, they participated in Satan's rebellious idea. They aligned themselves, whether consciously or not, with the kingdom of darkness, and thus became imitators of Satan. As a result, everything changed. A shock wave rippled throughout the earth.

Implications of the Diabolical Victory

Thus far we have tried to outline the thought process behind Lucifer's fall, along with the awful idea that persuaded others to commit treason with him. It was promised that at some point we would land this ship squarely in the Scriptures and focus on texts and biblical concepts validating the proposed thesis. We are now ready to dock. In order to do this, attention will be paid to some of the implications of Adam's fall into sin. This will help frame future discussions.

As has already been stated, much of what underlies the conclusions of this work do not necessarily flow out of explicit texts, per se, but rather move backwards from a compilation of biblical concepts (rooted in a matrix of texts, of course). Perhaps one of the most important elements to solving the riddle of the angelic fall is the ability to draw parallels between sinful men and Satan's kingdom. The cardinal point here is that mankind essentially emulates Satan's ideals. The claim is that the kingdom of darkness on earth is very much seeking to vindicate that original idea which precipitated the fall of Lucifer. Since men have a share in this demonic project, and since society itself reflects the Evil One, this provides a porthole through which we can peer into the past and glean a number of important truths. The one is anchored in the other.

The objective at this point, therefore, will be to thread together a number of implications surrounding the fall of Adam.

These will fall under two general headings. The first has to do with a change in the status of humanity; the second, a change in the status of real estate. Once outlined, specific parallels between sinful man and the demonic realm can be drawn more convincingly, thereby bolstering the thesis of this work.

Children of Darkness

The first implication is a peculiar one. It revolves around the idea of sonship. The contention is that when Satan led Adam and Eve into sin, humanity's photo album changed. A new figure entered the picture, for in that fateful moment when Adam bit into the forbidden fruit, the world gained a new father. And that new father was Satan.

At first glance, this might seem rather bizarre, even objectionable, but when a passage like John 8 is brought into focus, a terrifying and revealing truth emerges.

The passage reads,

"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."

They answered him, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you

seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did."

They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father--even God."

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me." (John 8:31-45)

While discoursing with a group of Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said some things that didn't sit well with them. They didn't appreciate His telling them, for one, that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. So in response, they dug in their heels and exclaimed that they weren't anyone's slave, and that Abraham was their father. "We are offspring of Abraham," they objected, "and have never been enslaved by anyone." (vs. 33) The reader will certainly roll their eyes at the claim that they had never been enslaved by anyone, given Israel's history, but Jesus didn't address the blatant error. Surprisingly, He chose instead to disagree with their claim to Abraham's fatherhood over them, even though they were in fact Jews by birth. This is because Jesus' disagreement went much deeper than biology. He placed His finger on another more fundamental type of sonship, one that looks beyond skin and searches the heart.

Consider again Jesus' reply, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did... Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." (John 8:39a, 43-44a)

Here Jesus floors them with the words, “You are of your father the devil.” But how could he say that? Wasn’t Abraham their biological father?

Here we’re confronted with a truth that pervades the Scriptures, but is easily missed by modern eyes. The truth is this: whether a child of God or a child of Satan, every individual emulates their respective father, because a son patterns himself after their father.

In our contemporary culture, this concept isn’t nearly as evident as it once was. There was a time when fathers passed their particular trade on to their sons. So if your father was a baker, then odds were good that you would end up becoming a baker. If your father was a carpenter, then you would be taught carpentry. If masonry, then masonry. If you father’s name was Stradivarius, you would learn how to make violins.⁴⁰

This often isn’t the case today. Young men rarely follow in their father’s footsteps, so far as employment is concerned. But in ancient agrarian society, sons often carried on their fathers’ work. A young Jewish boy’s training, apart from his learning to read and write at the local synagogue, was conducted under his father’s tutelage. Because of this they were often identified with their family in terms of the particular vocation. This explains why Jesus is repeatedly referred to as the carpenter’s son, or simply, as in the case of Mark, the carpenter (Mark 6:3). The relationship cements the tight identification.

Due to this close relationship a wide array of biblical images turn on a kind of metaphorical use of son. So, for example, men are sometimes called “sons of Belial” (Judges 20:13; 1 Sam 10:27, 30:22). This isn’t meant to suggest that the individual is somehow genetically related to Belial, as if a DNA test could determine the link. The phrase has a functional usage, not a biological one. Belial means worthlessness. So if someone calls you a son of Belial, they’re

⁴⁰ I am greatly indebted to D.A. Carson for this insight and have relied heavily on him. See Dr. Carson’s lectures at the 2008 Desiring God Pastor’s Conference.

not criticizing your father, but are basically saying that you're so horribly worthless that you must belong to the worthless family.

Along such lines, recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:9. Speaking to the crowds, He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." This isn't telling us how someone becomes a Christian. It's saying, rather, that those who emulate peaceful behavior show themselves to be children of the great peacemaker Himself, God the Father.

With such familial ties comes ethical shadowing. This follows quite naturally from the father/son relationship. Sons not only watch and learn a particular trade from their fathers, but they often pattern themselves after their character, either for good or ill.⁴¹ So if God is your father, it is a patterning towards good (Romans 8:13-14). He says, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15). Alternatively, if Satan is your father, you will be evil. Like Cain, who, as John says, "was of that wicked one" (John 3:12), these children behave wretchedly, even murdering their kin.

A number of texts make this plain. Consider first Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Recounting to them their pre-Christian life, the apostle writes:

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the

⁴¹ While the patterning of daughters after their mothers isn't as prevalent as the father/son imagery, the concept isn't entirely absent from the Scriptures. In Ezekiel 16, the prophet draws a familial analogy between Sodom and Samaria, on the one hand, and Jerusalem, calling them sisters. Moreover, the Lord levels this charge against His people, "Like mother, like daughter" (vs. 44), saying that their mother was a Hittite and their father an Amorite, thereby establishing a link between the behavior of His people and those of pagan practice.

body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Eph 2:1-3)

Note how Paul refers to those who follow the prince of the power of the air (Satan) as sons of disobedience. Here the familial and ethical shine together with remarkable clarity. The term *peripateo* (walked) in verse 1 is understood in terms of following after something. What are they following? They are following the course of this world, which refers to that system of life standing in stark opposition to God (1 John 2:15-16), as well as its prince, Satan. Following after the world and Satan naturally results in sinful behavior. This is why Paul can say that they were “by nature children of wrath,” carrying out the passions of the flesh.

In contradistinction, having now been rescued by Christ and made alive (vs. 5), these saints are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works (vs. 10). In Christ there is to be a radical reorientation in the way we walk. This is due to a change in families (Eph 1:5; Col 1:13). Therefore, Paul tells the Ephesians not to walk like the Gentiles any longer (4:17), for they are not of darkness, but of light. Paul commands, “Walk as children of the light” (5:8).

If Paul is clear, then the apostle John is crystal clear. Speaking bluntly, he writes,

“Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.” (1 John 3:7-10)

Here a slightly tangential, but nevertheless relevant thought is worth considering. During the days of King David, when he was settled in his palace enjoying rest from his enemies, the Lord spoke to him through the prophet Nathan, promising many great blessings (2 Samuel 7:1-17). This is the Davidic covenant. One of the blessings included a promise to establish the throne of David's offspring forever (vs. 13). Interestingly, right after declaring this, God said, "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (vs. 14). This is amazing! The children of David would be able to say, "Yes, David is my father. But so is Jehovah!"

As a divinely appointed ruler in Israel, these kings were to lead righteously, not only because righteousness is expected in the lives of God's people, but because the earthly throne was an earthly representation of God's throne (1 Chronicles 29:22-23). The greater reality served as a model for the lesser. But in addition to this, the idea of walking like one's father played a prominent, ethical role. The king's father was none other than God Himself; therefore the king was to reflect the ideals of his father.

Of course, everyone knows how miserably Israel's kings fell short. But as everyone likewise knows, Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise. As such, He is the Son *par excellence*. He perfectly obeyed His Father. In every way, He walked righteously. In light of this truth, consider John 5:19,

"So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.'" (John 5:19)

Here is the epitome of sonship.

It is ultimately this concept that underscores Jesus' puzzling words in John 8. His disbelieving audience was acting like Satan, not faithful Abraham (Gal 3:7). This was perfectly natural, given the fact that the devil was in actuality their father! They were merely reflecting his nature.

When this concept is carried back to the Garden, it more greatly illuminates the profound alteration in human nature that occurred at the time of the fall. Not only did Adam and Eve, along with all their posterity, become children of wrath, but they became mirrors reflecting Satan.

A Dark Dominion

The second implication is no less startling. Satan not only became the father of sinful humanity, but a world leader, one ruling over the kingdoms of the earth. By virtue of man's fall into sin, he gained prime real estate in the war against God's throne, a planet where he could expand his empire.

This follows quite naturally, given Satan's enslavement of the human race. If Adam was in fact a king, one commissioned to subdue and fill the earth,⁴² it follows that the human enterprise of building society would be fundamentally altered, thoroughly infected with sin and brought under Satan's influence. The arts would be affected. The way men speak would change. Aspirations, love, government, recreation, family life, yes, even the very thoughts of man would be radically reoriented around the evil one.

There can be no other conclusion. The evidence is everywhere. But like the proverbial fish in water, we may not realize just how wet we are. We need Scripture to tell us just how real and pervasive this darkness truly is. Two particularly illuminating passages are worth noting.

In the first instance, nestled in the second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul, while defending the transparency of his apostolic proclamations, teaches that the gospel may be veiled to those who are perishing. Explaining why this is so, he writes,

⁴² For further development of this idea, I would heartily recommend the lecture, "David's Enemies Under Foot," by Professor Green, which can be found online at Westminster Theological Seminary. G.K. Beale also nicely develops the subject in the fourth chapter of his volume "We Become What We Worship."

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Cor 4:4)

Satan is here called the god (*theos*) of this age.⁴³ He is a ruler exercising great influence, even blinding the minds of men so as to keep them from understanding and embracing certain truths.

The choice of the word “god” is interesting. We have argued that Lucifer believed he could be like the Most High, actually be a god unto himself, exercising powers exceeding God’s own divine perfections. Here Paul grants this title to Satan. Of course, he doesn’t mean to say that this title should be applauded, or that the one true and living God has somehow been supplanted. Quite the contrary. It is merely a statement of recognition. Nevertheless, this proves instructive. It teaches that Satan is in fact exerting massive control; one might even say reigning over the earth.⁴⁴ His roots run deep and his dominion circumambulates the globe. This evil presence and potent influence, when combined with his godless quest for power, warrants the title “god of this age.”

This concept is expressed just as clearly, if not more clearly, in 1 John 5:19. Having already made a number of stark juxtapositions, John writes,

“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

⁴³ Given Galatians 1:4, we may safely infer that Satan is the god of this present evil age.

⁴⁴ Here some of my Amillennial friends might feel that the word “reign” is too strong a term, given Satan’s having been bound in Revelation 20. I agree that Christ won a decisive victory, indeed, *the* decisive victory at the cross, thus triumphing over Satan and binding him. Nevertheless, Satan is still very much active. This present age is an evil age. Only at Christ’s return will all things be made new. In the meantime, the gospel will go out to the nations, and it will be successful, though continually challenged and attacked by the forces of evil.

Lest we play games with the term “world” in an effort to minimize the extent of Satan’s control, John adds the adjective “whole,” thereby vanquishing the retorts of those who might quibble with the apostle. It is undeniable. The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

This means that when we look back over the history of mankind at kingdoms like that of ancient Egypt, or the Babylonian Empire, or the Persian Empire, or the Roman Empire, we know that these civilizations weren’t simply human endeavors. Behind them and in them, Satan was at work, manipulating, even orchestrating their choices, their ethics, their religious views and politics. The influence operates on a macro, as well as a micro level.⁴⁵

For example, we know from 1 Timothy 4:1 that certain doctrines are demonic in nature.⁴⁶ Unlike true prophets who speak by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), these false teachers are demonically inspired. A deceiving spirit whispers in the false prophet’s ear and directs their thoughts unto appointed ends (1 Kings 21:21-22).

False religions are, as would be expected, no less demonic (Psalm 106:36-37). While warning the Corinthians to flee idolatry, the apostle Paul warns,

“Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices

⁴⁵ This isn’t to say that men are simply puppets in the hands of Satan. They happily consent. Satan does influence men greatly, but not to the exclusion of their own willing. Calvin is helpful here. Speaking of Satan’s control, he writes, “When it is said, then, that the will of the natural man is subject to the power of the devil, and is actuated by him, the meaning is, not that the will, while reluctant and resisting, is forced to submit (as masters oblige unwilling slaves to execute their orders), but that, fascinated by the impostures of Satan, it necessarily yields to his guidance, and does homage to him.” *Institutes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), 266.

⁴⁶ One cannot help but recall the origin of Islam. While meditating in a cave, it is reported that Muhammad was choked by the angel Gabriel and told to proclaim (the soon to be delivered messages).

of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.”

Lastly, we need only recall the imagery of John in Revelation. Like Daniel, the apostle describes nations in a pictorial fashion, likening them to beasts. They are strange and awful creatures wreaking havoc and inspiring fear. They are real kingdoms, the kind documented in history textbooks. And yet, behind these beastly kingdoms, Satan is present, manipulating the masses to achieve his ends. Over and over again, John links the realities of earth with spiritual realities. They're inseparable.

Satanic Sonship + World Dominion = An Interpretive Grid

When woven together, these observations prove instructive. In the first implication, it was shown that humanity reflects Satan, their demonic father. In the second implication, it was noted that Satan is exercising control over the whole earth. Everything from empires to nations to tribes to kingdoms fall under his sway (Rev 13:7). When these points are combined and brought to bear on passages like Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-15, two sections of Scripture that have long been debated and thought to have some bearing on Lucifer's fall, light is shed on their meaning.

Consider how the words of Isaiah 14:12-14 seem to elevate beyond the borders of Babylon to something far loftier, even heavenly.

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the
nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit
on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I
will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make
myself like the Most High.'"

Ezekiel is similar,

"Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you" (Ezekiel 28:12-15).

Not everyone thinks these are referring to Satan, however. There are those who grunt with disapproval at the suggestion. Before forging ahead and explaining why these passages do in fact say something about Satan's fall, we should pause and consider the rationale of those who think otherwise.

First and foremost, dissenters point out that the text in each instance explicitly identifies the individual as a human being, not an angel. For example, in the case of Isaiah, it is the king of Babylon who is in view (14:4). Add to this the historical setting of Isaiah, along with the historical details scattered throughout the surrounding verses, which clearly point to Babylon, and the verdict seems clear. This is not referring to an angelic fall in the primordial past.

Calvin is particularly forceful here. Like Sampson of old, the French reformer thrashes the ignorant with the jawbone of exegesis, causing sophomoric commentators to flee in terror. Commenting on Isaiah 14:12, he writes,

"Isaiah proceeds with the discourse which he had formerly begun as personating the dead, and concludes that the tyrant differs in no respect from other men, though his object was to lead men to believe that he was some god. He employs an

elegant metaphor, by comparing him to *Lucifer*, and calls him the *Son of the Dawn*; and that on account of his splendor and brightness with which he shone above others. The exposition of this passage, which some have given, as if it referred to Satan, has arisen from ignorance; for the context plainly shows that these statements must be understood in reference to the king of the Babylonians. But when passages of Scripture are taken up at random, and no attention is paid to context, we need to wonder that mistakes of this kind frequently arise. Yet it was an instance of very gross ignorance, to imagine that *Lucifer* was the king of the devils, and that the Prophet gave him this name. But as these inventions have no probability whatever, let us pass by them as useless fables.”

Calvin is great to quote, especially when he’s on your side. But if you happen to fall opposite his frown, the point of his pen suddenly isn’t so joyous. Nevertheless, for all the apparent folly, the elegant metaphors and lofty heavenly language of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 lead some to assert that the account is referring to something beyond that of the ancient Middle East- that it is in fact referring to a time far more distant, and to a place mysteriously ethereal. They perceive no discrepancy in affirming the prophet’s ability to speak of heavenly matters.

Concerning Ezekiel, Erwin Lutzer explains it this way,

“But then the prophets launch into descriptions that could not apply to any human being; they describe a more powerful being who stands behind the kings of this world. They tell us of a creature who once possessed awesome beauty, but now has become thoroughly evil. It is as if they are looking back through the corridors of time and seeing cosmic history. We are introduced to a creature who lived in a garden of God but ended in the abyss of contempt and humiliation... If you ask why Bible scholars have for centuries believed that Ezekiel begins by discussing the king of Tyre but ends with a report about Lucifer, you would find

that it is because this description cannot refer to any human being.”⁴⁷

In order to untie this knot, one ought to listen carefully to Calvin and concede that he makes a very good point- a sound point. Isaiah refers to a human king, through and through. The identification is clear, so one dare not try to wiggle out from under it.

The problem with restricting the prophet’s sphere of reference to that of only a pagan king, however, would be akin to ignoring the typology of the Davidic throne. David was certainly a Jewish king. No doubt about that. But he pictured more than the head of a Jewish monarchy. He was a type of the Messiah. Therefore he imaged greater realities.

The same is true with Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. The rationale for making this claim rests on the correlation between these individuals and Satan. Satan is so intimately bound up with sinful humanity, as well as the kingdoms of sinful humanity, that it is impossible to separate them. They’re like fire and heat. This explains why the language of Isaiah and Ezekiel can so easily escalate to heavenly heights. The pride of the Babylonian king, and probably the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28⁴⁸ (or perhaps Adam⁴⁹), reflect Satan, the very embodiment of pride. It is this overlap that

⁴⁷ Ibid., 24-25.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Edwards, commenting on Ezekiel 28, says, “It is exceedingly manifest that the king of Tyrus is here spoken of as a type of the devil, or the prince of the angels or cherubim that fell.” *Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody: Hendrickson, volume 2), 608.

⁴⁹ G.K. Beale writes, “Commentators have variously identified this figure either as a fallen angel (usually Satan) or, more often, as Adam. Whichever it is, the king of Tyre’s sin and judgment is seen primarily through the lens of the sin and judgment of the figure in Eden instead of his own particular sin, so that this most ancient figure becomes a representative of the king of Tyre, and the latter’s sin and judgment is viewed as a kind of recapitulation of the primeval sin. If this figure is to be identified with Adam, which is likely, then the king is being identified with Adam’s sin and punishment.” *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 137-138.

allowed Isaiah to so freely blur the lines between the figures. It isn't either/or, but rather both/and.

Widening the View

Here a larger point can be made, and it can be made by asking a simple question: Why limit the parallel to pride?

If there is in fact a correlation between ungodly rulers and Satan, then an entire spectrum of evil characteristics unfolds before us. In the same way that godly men model Christ, so too, ungodly men reflect the Evil One. In the case of Christians, one wouldn't restrict their description of saints to one godly attribute, like humility, for example. Similarly, while pride certainly features prominently in the lives of pagan kings, it would be wrong to restrict the matter to pride alone. They're a living catalog of vices!

In many ways, this is so obvious it feels silly to voice the point. And yet, if it is overlooked, or underappreciated, one could run right over parallels highlighting the tenets and ideals of the kingdom of darkness.

The significance here is how this point relates to the angelic fall. If the ideals of the kingdom of darkness on earth are not entirely disconnected from Satan's original sin, then sinful traits would inform us, in some measure, about the past; a line could be drawn between what is presently observed and the nature of the first rebellion. In this vein, history could be excavated in order to find clues and pointers imbedded in sinful kings, as they would detail Satan's ambition and character.

But of course kings wouldn't be the only individuals worthy of investigation. There are others whose actions powerfully model the devil. Secular humanists occupy a special space in this regard. They not only interact directly with God's law and character, openly denouncing, even detesting His ways, but they actively seek to establish another way of life, one built specifically on godless principles.

Given the potential of these two groups, time will be given to exploring them. Secular humanists will be considered first, then pagan kings. Once both have been surveyed, a number of conclusions will be drawn, further crystallizing the underlying ambitions of Satan, and by extension, his awful idea.

The Tongues of Men and Fallen Angels

It was the summer of 2010, when I first listened to the debate between Pastor Doug Wilson and the famed atheist, Christopher Hitchens. The meeting of these heavy weights caused a stir, and I can still remember the sense of anticipation welling within me when I found the audio online and downloaded it. I knew it was going to be an immensely enjoyable two hours.

With their usual wit and charm, both men slugged it out, wielding their arguments like swords. The debate proved to be not only wildly entertaining, but illuminating.

Near the end, sometime during the Q and A segment, Mr. Hitchens really uncoiled his tongue. He spoke with venom about God, blaspheming His name, and all with an air of intellectual superiority.

I had certainly listened to my fair share of atheists before, but there was something about Hitchens' words that struck me. During one of his more carefully crafted string of invectives, I can distinctly remember thinking to myself, "I'm listening to Satan."

This can sound rather sensational. One can almost picture a sweaty preacher thumping his pulpit, declaring, "Oooh, yes, brothers and sisters, I heard the devil's voice that night. Yeees, I did." One can also certainly picture Hitchens rolling his eyes at my comment and calling it delusional. Ridicule notwithstanding, the point remains. There was something about his choice of words, in combination with his demeanor and tone of voice that made me hear him in a new light.

Approaching the microphone, a woman asked Mr. Hitchens that if there was in fact a loving God, what would this God have to

do, or say, in order for him to believe that He does in fact exist and that He does in fact want to get to know him.

Hitchens answered as follows,

“It’s pretty self evident that if there is a deity, he is not a loving and compassionate and tender One who wishes all the best for us all the time. If that was so our lives would be banal; they’d be empty; they’d be pointless; they’d have no meaning; we’d have no reason for independence of mind; we’d have no reason for inquiry or free will; we’d have no reason to relish the struggle for innovation by anxiety and doubt, and so all of that would be, uh, an uh, warm bath- it would be like being a Buddhist. It would be a warm bath for semi-consciousness and benignity. Thank goodness it’s not true... When I talked about dictatorship before, I would say of it, if it was celestial, what I would say about it if it was human and merely terrestrial, that it would be even worse if it came to me under the excuse of being benign. The worst kind of patronizing tyrannical authority is the one that says it’s controlling you for your own good.”

Hitchens’ answer is pure blasphemy. He thinks of life with God as banal. Empty. Devoid of meaning. A shackled existence where one’s thoughts are chained, one where the aspirations of men are confined under the “tyrannical authority” of God.

If it isn’t plain already, Hitchens doesn’t want to be under God’s rule. He hates the idea. And so does Satan.

As has been argued thus far, this shared hatred of God isn’t merely coincidental. It’s perfectly natural. As an unbeliever, Hitchens hates God, yes, because he’s a hardened sinner, but also because Satan is his spiritual father. The words of the one reflect those of the other. This means that while his answer was certainly his own, much like the pride of the Babylonian king, it pointed beyond itself. Like a son mimicking the mannerisms of his father, Hitchens sounded like the devil.

That is why I felt like I was listening to Satan.⁵⁰

It is this observation that provided a context for sketching out the Evil One's words back in chapter two. While everything written there was certainly speculative, as no one knows what was exactly said, the speculation was rooted in the reflective speech of his children. A person can listen to them and work their way backwards. The setting and circumstances surrounding an atheist like Hitchens are certainly different than those of Satan, but the essence of the sin is remarkably similar.

This approach is, therefore, part of the methodological framework advanced in this work. If someone were to draw a line down a sheet of paper and write at the top of one of the columns, "Relevant Material Concerning the Fall of Satan," I would happily scribble under it "Hitchens quote."

Now the question that begs to be asked, given the viability of this approach, is: What can be learned from all this?

Here it would be beneficial to consider a few more atheistic quotes. Like policemen trying to produce a composite sketch of a criminal, we'll observe common themes and distinctive traits among the ungodly and hopefully sharpen our picture of Satan's awful idea.

The Anatomy of Unbelief

Enter Dan Barker.

Mr. Barker isn't one of the so called four horsemen, but he's certainly been an influential and active atheist for years, debating,

⁵⁰ Dr. Jay Adams draws a similar parallel in his book "The Grand Demonstration." On page 94, he states, "As far as we know, evil began with Satan and the angels who 'left their proper habitation' (Jude 6). What sort of event this reference describes, we do not know. But in itself it reveals the same spirit, of wanting what one is not entitled to, that was present in the Garden, in the philosophy of Protagoras, in the 'enlightenment,' and in modern humanism. In all, there is an attempt to assume for one's self rights and privileges that God has retained for Himself" (Santa Barbara: EastGate Publishers, 1991).

writing, and contributing to atheistic causes like the *Freedom from Religion Foundation*. He's a good representative of the position.

In a debate in 2008 at Harvard University entitled *Christianity vs. Atheism*, Dan Barker spoke forcefully, railing against God with open hatred. In one segment, he said the following,

“On balance, the moral teachings of the founder of Christianity are inferior and they are dangerous. It's to the credit of most Christians, I think, that they have risen above their brutal Bible. They are smarter than Jesus. They are kinder than God. Since Christianity is a salvation system and there's no such thing as sin, then we don't need it. Even Jesus is quoted as saying, “They who are healthy don't need the doctor, only they who are sick,” in Matthew 9:12. We atheists don't consider ourselves sick. Atheism is a wellness of mind, and I think it's a kind of courage of conviction in a predominantly religious culture that makes it possible for us to see the world as it really is- which is our best shot at creating solutions which are truly relevant. Think about this: If salvation is the cure, then atheism is the prevention.”

One doesn't have to listen long to realize that atheists want to be their own standard, judging everything according to the dictates of their own imagination. This includes God's Word. They stand over the Bible and call it brutal, thereby invoking an ethical norm, but one ultimately grounded in the subjective swirl of self.⁵¹ This move essentially positions them above God. They are the authoritative bar by which God must bow. All else must measure

⁵¹ Atheists can (and often do) dispute this observation, but it is done so in vain. I could argue why this is so, but the atheist will continue to judge my reply according to their own standards and promptly reject it, thus demonstrating, once again, that they are gods unto themselves. Claiming to prize the disciplines of science and rationality doesn't help the situation either. Facts are always interpreted. And they will interpret the facts in such a way so as to appease their fundamental heart commitments. Having listened to countless hours of atheistic podcasts and interviews and debates, nothing could be plainer to me. We will examine this further in chapter 7.

up to their standards. C. S. Lewis famously described this as putting God in the docks. Men are both judge and jury, not God.

All this is unfettered arrogance. It is one of the hallmark characteristics of atheism. If these atheists were in the Garden of Eden, they would have set up a science lab and tested the claims of their Creator. “How can God expect me, a rational man, to follow Him without making sure He knows what He’s talking about? I’ll decide whether or not He’s worthy of such trust. I’ll determine whether or not He should be obeyed. We must judge Him according to a criterion of our own making!”

I will determine... I will decide... I will judge...

With these declarations there is a subtle, but significant shift in authority. If there’s one word that best describes this outlook, besides sinful, that word would surely be autonomy.

Autonomy

Autonomy lies at the root of sin. It lurks behind every sentence in the Barker quote above. It energizes the belief that there is wisdom found outside the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). This is why Mr. Barker can say that Christians are smarter than Jesus. Likewise, autonomy allows him to assert that he sees the world “as it really is.” Remember the point about “Satanic Omniscience?” Sin and autonomy, it is believed, open new vistas of knowledge. Reality isn’t a system singularly defined by God’s nature, but a realm full of godless potential. It is a place where facts can be reinterpreted, recreated and lived out.⁵²

⁵² Canadian physician and prominent atheist, Dr. Marian Sherman, wrote, “Humanism seeks the fullest development of the human being... Humanists acknowledge no Supreme Being and we approach all life from the point of view of science and reason. Ours is not a coldly clinical view, for we believe that if human beings will but practice love of one another and use their wonderful faculty of speech, we can make a better world, happy for all. But there must be no dogma.” Toronto Star Weekly, September 11th, 1965, What Makes an Atheist Tick?

Autonomy is the godless quest for God-like attributes.

There will be much more to say about this when epistemology and the irony of sin is examined at a later point, but for now it's sufficient to note that Mr. Barker believes he is the one who truly understands reality.

As an aside, it is likely that when most people think of Satan, or Satanism, they immediately conjure images of pentagrams or Ouija boards, possibly ghoulish costumes with axes protruding from their heads. It's all very "Halloweenish." While there's much to be said about these observations, as Satan does represent death and horror, there is nevertheless a far subtler and more fundamental element that often escapes the pedestrian's notice. It is this: At the very root of Satanism is pride, autonomy, and a refusal to submit to God's Word. When cast in the light of costumes and witchcraft, Halloween turns out to be far more manageable for sinners. So long as they don't engage in sorcery or become serial killers, they believe they're basically free from the grip of Satan. They just aren't that bad. But if the Garden teaches us anything, it is that one sin, one act of treason, lies at the heart of Satanism, and is more than enough to throw a whole universe out of orbit. Hell comes crashing in and judgment roars. And all that was once good is lost and perverted under the weight of sin. If men would only come to understand this simple truth, they would know how far they fall short of meeting God's standard of righteousness and learn something of Samuel's words to King Saul:

The British Humanist Association states in their credo, "Humanists seek to make the best of the one life we have by creating meaning and purpose for ourselves." (<http://humanism.org.uk>)

Tom Flynn likewise stated, "We don't have big "M" meaning. We don't have the big guy in the sky. We don't think there is one capital "M" meaning in life. We think it's enough to have small "m" meanings that each of us build out of our own lives and our own aspirations and our own judgments of what's best for the human future." Point of Inquiry, March 14th, 2011, found online at: http://www.pointofinquiry.org/spirituality_friend_or_foe_adam_frank_and_tom_flynn/

And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry." (1Sa 15:22-23a)

Free Thought

Consider another quote. In the same debate, Mr. Barker warned,

"And look at how the sheep just follow along. [It] is dangerous to be sheep. We should not be slaves. Paul called himself a slave of Christ proudly, and Paul said that a Christian should bring into captivity every thought unto the obedience of Christ. Captivity is not freedom. In the proverbs it's "Lean not on your own understanding." It also says that "There's a way that seems right to a man but the end thereof is death." That is dangerous to surrender your mind to someone else's mind, be it a God or a dictator or a master or a church or a pope."

If autonomy is the flag waving highest on the castle of sin, banners reading "free thought" line its walls. Like Hitchens, Dan Barker views obedience to Christ as intellectual suicide, like a man locking himself in a cell and tossing the key out of reach. According to them, divine sovereignty should be viewed as a dangerous and repugnant restraint. Man must be able to think freely, which is to say that he must be able to think independently of God.⁵³ The phrase "tyrannical dictator" is often tossed around. Sometimes "bully" is used. God, they say, is cosmic thought police.

⁵³ In his book *Losing Faith in Faith*, Dan Barker writes, "How happy can you be when you think every action and thought is being monitored by a judgmental ghost?"

In line with these basic convictions, humanists produce magazines entitled, “Free Inquiry,” and coin terms like “Free thought” to define their movement. With glowing pride, they champion the right to form thoughts, even entire worldviews, apart from God. And why? Because it’s a necessary component of autonomy. You cannot have autonomy without “free thought.”

Dan Barker writes, “There is joy in rationality, happiness in clarity of mind. Freethought is thrilling and fulfilling- absolutely essential to mental health and happiness.”⁵⁴

Oh, how relevant the words of Milton when he imagines Satan as saying,

“The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven out of Hell, a Hell of Heaven... Here at least we shall be free; the Almighty hath not built here for His envy; will not drive us hence. Here we may reign secure, and, in my choice, to reign is worth ambition, though in Hell. Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven...”

In sum, six major characteristics, or presuppositions, underlying atheism include:

- The belief that submission to God is like slavery
- The belief that autonomy is fundamental to life, an unchallengeable human right
- The belief that men can and should judge God and His standards, thereby elevating themselves above God’s law
- The belief that God’s ways are not the path to ultimate happiness
- The belief that “free-thought” is the surest means to obtaining ultimate truth⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ This is often cast in terms of the sciences, as though the discipline of science demands a materialistic starting point.

With all of this there is an intense hatred of God. Like Satan, they love to rail against the Lord, as He poses the greatest threat to their cherished autonomy. Jesus Christ is the One who commands, “Repent!” And they despise Him for it.

Upping the Stakes

Earlier it was said that autonomy is the godless quest for God-like attributes. Atheists don’t come right out and claim to be gods, or divine beings in the flesh, but they certainly model the ambition.⁵⁶ Pagan kings, on the other hand, aren’t nearly so shy. Like the Babylonian king in Isaiah’s day, they proclaim, in one way or another, “I will make myself like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14). This has been true of emperors, Caesars, dictators, and many other forms of ungodly, world leadership.

Here one need only recall the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt sitting on their thrones, claiming to be divine, saying, according to Ezekiel, “The Nile is mine; I made it for myself” (Ezekiel 29:3, 9). Or Nebuchadnezzar, who, when he looked out over the Babylonian empire from his rooftop, declared, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty” (Daniel 4:30)?⁵⁷ They are like the King of Tyre, of whom the Lord said, “In the pride of your heart you say, ‘I am a god’” (Ezekiel 28:2).

⁵⁶ It’s hard to take the Humanist Manifestos as asserting anything less. In the second Manifesto, we are told, “As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity.” And again, “We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction.” As Protagoras, the father of sophistry, once said, “Man is the measure of all things.”

⁵⁷ Consider as well the pompous claims of the Chaldeans in Isaiah 47. They said, “I will continue forever—the eternal queen” (vs. 7), and “I am, and there is none besides me,” (vs. 8, 10), which is an extraordinarily blasphemous counterclaim to the Lord’s words in Isaiah 45:18, 21-22.

The imperial cult of Rome likewise deified its leaders, registering them in the Roman Pantheon after death. Some of these emperors, however, felt it necessary to expedite the process. Why wait until death to become a god? Therefore, some out of a mad desire to be worshipped demanded to be viewed as divine, while yet alive. Caligula is a good example. Dressing up like Mercury, Hercules, and even Venus, he claimed to be worthy of worship. He ordered that a sacred precinct be set apart for his worship at Miletus. Always seeking to outdo himself and others (even the gods), he erected another temple on the Palatine and sought to remodel a statue of Zeus after himself.⁵⁸

Titus Domitianus, another Roman Emperor, more commonly known as Domitian, was equally zealous in his quest for self deification. One Roman historian wrote of him, “For he even insisted upon being regarded as a god and took vast pride in being called ‘master’ and god. These titles were used not merely in speech but also in written documents.”⁵⁹

Antiochus Ephiphanes, an unthinkable evil Syrian king in the 2nd century BC, sacrificed swine in the Jewish temple, forbade under penalty of death circumcision, Sabbath observance, and the reading of Torah. He was a madman bent on “civilizing” the Jews and would execute some for refusing to eat swine’s flesh, while slaughtering others for not worshipping pagan idols. Many were sold into slavery, while others were tortured in an attempt to get them to renounce their faith. Significantly, he demanded to be worshipped as a god. In fact, it’s reported that his coins were stamped with the inscription *Theos Epiphanes* (God manifest), probably a blasphemous counterfeit of the Hebrew concept “God with us.”

Daniel spoke cryptically of this monstrosity, writing prophetically,

⁵⁸ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LIX.28

⁵⁹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, cited at the Associates for Biblical Research, found online at: <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/>

“Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper.” (Daniel 8:9-12)

This phenomenon isn't merely a relic of the past. All through the centuries, even up into the modern era, there have been those who have yearned for the title “God.” Japanese as well as Chinese emperors have long flirted with claims of divinity. The papacy with its Vicar of Christ theology and papal authority, in combination with its abuse of power and heretical doctrines, won it the title “anti-Christ” during the Protestant Reformation. One is also reminded of the scene in the documentary, *Prelude to War*, where a classroom of German children are shown proudly singing:

Adolf Hitler is our Savior, our hero.
He is the noblest being in the whole wide world.
For Hitler we live,
For Hitler we die.
Our Hitler is our Lord
Who rules a brave new world.

The desire of kings to be honored as divine is, on the one hand, totally bizarre, if not entirely absurd, given man's blatant fallibility and fragility.⁶⁰ But when viewed from the perspective of

⁶⁰ Ironically, the life of so many of these godless rulers ended in ignominy. Caesars were routinely assassinated, being poisoned or cut down in shadowy corners. Here one is also reminded of what the Lord said to the King of Tyre: “They will bring you down to the pit, and you will die a violent death in the heart of the seas. Will you then say, ‘I am a god,’ in the presence of those who

the spiritual realm, it's quite understandable, even if stark mad. Blind with an unquenchable thirst for power, these leaders become a law unto themselves, shaping society according to their own dictates. Their heads become swollen with pride. They ravage, steal, initiate war and take life. And not infrequently, God's people are horribly persecuted under their rule.

None of this is accidental. Nor is it merely the case of humanity creating a few bad apples. These men are anti-Christ, tyrants forged out of the factory of hell. As such, they crave to be like the Most High, because, as has been stressed, Satan craves to be like the Most High.

Stephen Charnock states it so very well,

“And since the devil hath, in all ages of the world, usurped a worship to himself which is only due to God, and would be served by man, as if he were the God of the world; since all his endeavor was to be worshipped as the Supreme God on earth, it is not unreasonable to think, that he invaded the supremacy of God in heaven, and endeavored to be like the Most High before his banishment, as he hath attempted to be like the Most High since.”⁶¹

The Epitome of Self-Deification

This synergism is, perhaps, made nowhere more evident than in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. Writing to the unsettled and somewhat confused saints, Paul reminds them that the day of the Lord would not come until the rebellion occurred and the man of lawlessness was revealed (2:3). Describing this yet to be unveiled individual, Paul says, “He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that

kill you? You will be but a man, not a god, in the hands of those who slay you.” (Ezekiel 28:8-9)

⁶¹ *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), page 429.

he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess 2:4, NIV).

Here we see this distinctive attribute on full display. There is going to be a man who exalts himself above all, claiming, in a very real sense, to be the God of gods. It is a wildly idolatrous claim. But note that this man isn't working alone. "The coming of the lawless one," writes Paul, "will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing" (vs. 9-10). This man of sin will be the grand expression of Satan himself, an incarnation of unmitigated evil.

Now although the man of lawlessness is but a single person, this fact doesn't preclude one from drawing parallels with pagan kings. In the same section in 2 Thessalonians, Paul says that "the secret power of lawlessness is already at work" (vs. 7). While Paul was anticipating the arrival of this particular man, the same diabolical force was a present reality. It was, as he said, "already at work." This same perspective is found in John's writings. He can speak of a future and final anti-Christ figure, while yet maintaining present manifestations (1 John 2:18, 4:2-3).

It has long been the tendency of saints, especially those of a dispensational flavor, to peg a political/religious entity in their day as *the* anti-Christ. But as history moves on and as the evil dissipates and reemerges under a different banner, the once sure and bold predictions are shown to have been made in haste. While it's easy to grow frustrated with such predictive fervor, the sentiment isn't entirely without warrant. The biblical paradigm allows one to view these tyrannical eruptions as nothing less than the power of lawlessness at work. It's Satan seeking again to gain ascendancy.

So when the Reformers, for example, almost unanimously believed that the Pope was the anti-Christ, they were, in many ways, correct. Of course, he wasn't *the* anti-Christ, but yet another flare up in history. There will be a final, awful manifestation of evil, rivaling, even exceeding former embodiments, but it too is doomed to failure. As Paul assures the Thessalonians, the man of sin will be

destroyed by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (2 Thess 2:8).

In sum, pagan kings shouldn't be entirely divorced from the man of lawlessness. Since the same spirit is at work, they're of the same basic stock.

Counterfeiting God: A Case Study in Revelation

All this allows us to confidently assert that a crucial component of the pride of Satan includes the desire and ambition to be worshipped and esteemed as God. In the book of Revelation we receive further confirmation that we're on the right track.⁶²

Throughout the apocalyptic vision, the theme of spiritual warfare is underscored time and time again. The kingdom of darkness, with Satan at the helm, wars against God and His people. Symbolism is often employed to depict the conflict. Interestingly, a comparative analysis of this imagery reveals a kind of satanic counterfeiting of God. The devil apes God. This mimicking is, to be sure, a gross perversion of the Almighty, but not so dissimilar so as to preclude drawing parallels.

Chief among the examples is Satan's unholy attempt to model the triune nature of God. In order to develop this concept, consider first the picture in Revelation 13:1:

“And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns and his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.”

This isn't the first instance of a terrible monster emerging on the scene. In the previous chapter, a red Dragon bent on devouring the Messiah is depicted in vivid terms (vs. 4-5). Upon failing, he

⁶² I am greatly indebted to Vern Poythress and have leaned heavily on the insights found in his helpful book *The Returning King* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2000), especially pages 16-25.

directs his anger towards the rest of the people of God (vs. 17). After this, the vision suddenly turns to the Beast. The description and character of this new creature is remarkably similar to that of the Dragon. Like the Dragon, it is a terrifying monster (13:1-8). The Dragon has seven heads (12:3). The Beast has seven heads. The Dragon has ten horns, as does the Beast. The Dragon wears crowns on his heads. Similarly, the Beast has crowns on his horns. These striking similarities aren't accidental. The Beast images the Dragon.

But why? Let's back up.

John identifies the Dragon as "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (12:9). The identity of the creature is crystal clear. Now when the scene found in chapter 12 shifts to that of chapter 13, a curious segue is employed by the apostle. He notes that the Dragon "stood on the shore of the sea."⁶³ It may be reading too much into the statement, but the imagery, when combined with the forthcoming parallels, is reminiscent of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2. The allusion suggests that the Beast is the Dragon's creation. It is the Dragon who summons it and gives it his "power and his throne and great authority" (vs. 2b; see also vs. 4). The two are closely related, even to the point of both being worshipped (13:4). This is Satan's attempt to imitate God the Father by producing a counterfeit "son," namely, the Beast.

This counterfeiting is best seen by examining how the Beast counterfeits Christ. As already noted, the Beast has ten crowns on his horns (13:1). Christ has "many crowns" on his head (19:12). The Beast has blasphemous names (13:1), while Christ has excellent and majestic names (19:11-13, 16). The Beast utters proud words and blasphemies (13:5), but Christ speaks truth (19:11, 15). The Beast possesses great power (13:2). Christ possesses omnipotent power and authority (12:5, 10). Jesus is the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world and who rose victorious from the

⁶³ Textual variants occur at this verse, but the one quoted here is probably correct. If it isn't correct, however, the larger point of this section still holds.

grave (4:6). Curiously, the Beast even counterfeits the resurrection. In 13:3 we are told that one of its heads appeared to have a fatal wound, but the wound was healed. Addressing the seemingly fatal nature of the wound, Vern Poythress provides a helpful insight. He writes,

“The Beast did not actually die and come to life again. He did not experience an actual resurrection. But he had a wound that one would think *should* have led to his death. His recovery was marvelous and astonishing- so astonishing that it was a big factor in leading people to follow him. Just as the resurrection of Christ is the chief event that astonishes people and draws them to follow him (John 12:32), so here a counterfeit miracle, a counterfeit resurrection, leads to people following the Beast.”⁶⁴

As noted earlier, the Beast receives worship (13:4). This worship isn’t without songs of praise and admiration. The worshippers cry out, “Who is like the Beast? Who can make war against him?” This is a blasphemous attempt to counterfeit music composed for the worship of God. The Psalmist asks, “Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high” (Psalm 113:5)? Or consider the song of Moses when the LORD crushed the Egyptians in the Red Sea: “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders” (Exodus 15:11)?

The parallels continue. The followers of the Beast receive a mark, identifying them as his own (13:16). This mark secures various “blessings.” In a similar fashion, Christ seals His people by placing His name and His Father’s name on their foreheads (14:1). This seal secures an inheritance and the protection of God Almighty.

In accordance with Psalm 2 and Matthew 28, Jesus the Messiah is given all authority, both in heaven and in earth. He will rule the nations in righteousness. Through His death and

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

resurrection, He ransomed people from every tribe, tongue and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9-12). The Beast wants this as well. He wants to rule over everything. Therefore “authority was given it [the Beast] over every tribe and people and language and nation” (Rev. 13:7). We also know that the Beast makes war with the saints. But it doesn’t stop there. In the final confrontation, where Christ appears on a white horse, ready to destroy the enemies of God, the Beast responds by leading the kings of the earth out against Him (19:19). Again Poythress is helpful. He writes,

“In this scene, Christ is the divine warrior. He fulfills the Old Testament prophecies that speak of God appearing to fight against the enemies (Zech. 14:1-5; 9:14-17; Isa. 59:16-18; Hab. 3:11-15). Christ is the holy warrior, who judges with justice (Rev. 19:11). The Beast, we infer, is the demonic counterfeit, the unholy warrior from the demonic region of the abyss. As Christ is the head of the holy army, so the Beast is the head of the unholy army.”⁶⁵

As head of the unholy army, the Beast no doubt desires to function as a federal head. Here it might be recalled that Jesus is the second Adam. As such, He functions as the covenantal head of humanity, and serves as the pattern for glorified, human transformation. This is brought out in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49. Just as the descendants of the first Adam shared in his likeness, inheriting sin and bodies of dust, those connected with the second Adam shall be transformed, both physically and spiritually. They shall, as Paul writes, “bear the image of the man of heaven” (vs. 49), and be changed “in the twinkling of an eye” (vs. 52).

Due to the Beast’s desire to rule over all nations (Rev. 13:7-8), he aspires to be another federal head, perhaps, a third Adam, if you will, but one from the abyss. But this is sheer folly. Christ is not only the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:47), but the last (1 Cor. 15:45). Anything else is a vain and spurious counterfeit. There is nevertheless a transformative connection between the Beast and his

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Page 19.

followers. As his people, they reflect him. But note what they emulate. He's a grotesque beast, a strange and unnatural combination of lion, bear, leopard, and ten-horned monster (Rev. 13:2). Nations are likened to beasts (Daniel 2; 7). Individuals aren't exempt either. Describing certain false teachers, Peter says, "But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction" (2 Peter 2:12; see also Daniel 4:16). Sinners degrade and dehumanize not only others, but themselves through their debauchery. They are like beasts. As the last Adam, Christ Jesus will not only subdue the world of beastly men, but he will conquer the great Beast and establish the rule that was always meant to be established.

Returning to Satan's imitation of God, the Dragon imitates God the Father, while the Beast mimics the Son. But what about the Holy Spirit? Here the unholy triad is made complete with the introduction of another Beast, the False Prophet (Rev. 16:13). Following on the heels of the first Beast, we read in Revelation 13:11-14:

"Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived."

We are told that the False Prophet performs great signs (vs. 13). This isn't unlike the miraculous signs performed by the Holy Spirit. We also know that the Holy Spirit draws attention to Christ, thereby encouraging the worship of the Son. In a similar, but diabolical fashion, the False Prophet promotes the worship of the Beast (13:12). As the "Counselor," the Spirit is connected with

Christ, sharing in His work and authority (John 14:16, 18; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18). In some similar way, the False Prophet “exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence” (Rev. 13:12). Lastly, the Holy Spirit illuminates and guides people to the truth (1 John 2:27). But in contradistinction, the False Prophet deceives (Rev. 13:4).

In conclusion, Satan not only attempts to occupy the throne as Lord of all, but he attempts to mirror the very Godhead itself.

Sinful Men as a Link to the Past: A Note of Caution

Thus far we have examined the underlying presuppositions of atheists, as well as the distinctive attribute of self-deification found among pagan kings. More could be said about pagan kings,⁶⁶ but we need not delve further, as the other characteristics largely resemble those of the atheistic mindset (although a notable difference would include the degree of power and authority possessed by kings, which allows for greater manifestations of the noted attributes).

The purpose of this analysis has been to identify the underlying characteristics of each with the hopes of better understanding Satan’s most basic principles. This in turn will allow one to better reconstruct the nature of the first sin.

So what has been unearthed?

⁶⁶ With pagan kings there is:

- A shift from “God is the measure of all things” to “I am the measure of all things.” Or autonomy.
- An unquenchable desire for greater power and authority, even absolute power and absolute authority.
- Unmitigated pride and self-assurance.
- The demand for complete and total allegiance to their causes, which includes the violent conquest of neighboring, even distant nations.

When the blatant epistemological autonomy and strident self-sufficiency of atheism is forged with the godless absolutizing of the self and the unfettered pride of despotism, a truly horrific image emerges. We see a person consumed with a sense of their own greatness, or the perceived limitlessness of personal greatness. We see a person of passion and self-assurance, one who won't be told "No." They are the standard by which all else is measured. They will not bow the knee to any other. Why would they? They believe they possess the means, as well as the capacity, to stand over everything. Simply put, they are their own god.

Charnock writes,

"All sin in its nature is a contempt of the Divine dominion. As every act of obedience is a confirmation of the law, and consequently a subscription of the authority of the Lawgiver (Deut 27:26), so every breach to it is a conspiracy against the sovereignty of the Lawgiver; setting up our will against the will of God is an articing against his authority, as setting up our reason against the methods of God is an articing against his wisdom; the intendment of every act of sin is to wrest the scepter out of God's hand."⁶⁷

Having said all this, a caution is in order. One must be careful not to draw an unfiltered one-to-one correlation between the evil actions of kings (or devout atheists) and Satan's original idea. It must be borne in mind that Lucifer was a good creature when he conceived the doctrine. His idea was more like an acorn, not a fully mature oak. In other words, his original formulation wouldn't have been framed in terms of: "I want absolute power in order to rape

⁶⁷ *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), page 427-28. Charnock goes on to say, "All sin, in its nature, is the despoiling God of his sole sovereignty, which was probably the first thing the devil aimed at... It is likely his sin was an affecting equality with God in empire, or a freedom from the sovereign authority of God; because he imprinted such a kind of persuasion on man at his first temptation: 'Ye shall be as gods' (Gen 3:5)." His entire train of thought is excellent, and I would encourage the reader to investigate Charnock further.

and pillage.” Those raw desires flow out of an evil heart. Since he was holy, his idea must have been conceived in more congenial terms, at least initially. This is why the perspective advanced in this volume insists that Satan *thought* his idea was compatible with goodness. But more than that, the idea must have been able to be construed, through careful crafting, as being potentially good.

Here we’re brought full circle back to the six pillars of Satan’s idea outlined in chapter two. By exploring “that-which-God-cannot-do,” Satan convinced himself and a host of others that there was something grand to be gained, that there was a great potential to be unlocked. Autonomy whispered in his ear tales of splendor. It was a tale he adopted and chose to live out. And it is a doctrine found in the hearts and minds of fallen humanity.

Chapter 4

-Angels as Onlookers-

Puzzled Angels?

In the Garden, when Satan won what appeared to be a decisive victory, having enticed Adam to partake of the forbidden fruit, one cannot help but wonder if the elect angels who had stood resilient in the face of the first great apostasy weren't puzzled by the outcome, even troubled. For it must be stressed that when Adam fell, more was at stake than the question of one man's obedience. The all sufficiency and unique Lordship of God had been called into question by Lucifer. A challenge had gone forth and a rival kingdom had been established. Satan was intent on proving that his new way of life, that his newly forged path was more glorious and more promising than that of God's. He promised results. And now, in what was no doubt an advancement of darkness, Lucifer's position yielded measurable "fruit." Evidence had been acquired. Sinister "I told you so's" surely echoed in the ears of the elect angels.

The potency of the situation was amplified by another fact. Many had chosen to follow Lucifer, and some, if not all of the fallen angels, were former friends, persons whom the elect angels knew and loved. Now they were potent enemies. The first great falling away, therefore, wasn't without felt loss, especially when one considers the parting words of the demons. They probably mocked the faithful angels and cast aspersions on their character. Coups aren't exactly bastions of encouragement after all.

I suspect that the swell of emotions felt by the elect angels weren't entirely different than our own when a brother or sister in the Lord causes trouble in the church and suddenly leaves in disgust when discipline is enacted. It is a painful and sometimes

disillusioning experience for the faithful; painful because sin is a grievous thing;⁶⁸ disillusioning because of the chaotic nature of sin. It leaves one trying to make sense of the inexplicable.

The cataclysmic events were no doubt jarring. Indeed, the problem of evil has never been an emotionally neutral subject. It strikes at the heart of rational creatures. Angels are surely no exception.

One might wonder if this is stated too strongly. Sinless creatures, it might be supposed, wouldn't feel puzzled or troubled or harbor questions. Their trust would be so rock solid, so perfectly pure, they wouldn't feel uneasy, right? Doesn't John teach that love drives out fear?

Yes, love does drive out fear. And yes, trust in God would instill assurance and peace. But it doesn't mean the angels were fully aware of the plans of God. As such, they surely had questions. It also doesn't mean the angels were emotionally passive, as if they were celestial stoics. Their trust remained firm, but as creatures under trial, they had to choose whom they would trust. Trust requires faith. And behind their faith swirled a vast catalog of reasons, beliefs and convictions. With their every thought, Satan's idea was there, calling it into question, pressing on it, tempting it to see things from another perspective. If we are going to take seriously Lucifer's having drawn a host away from God, it is hard to imagine how anyone can think otherwise.

That being said, one's perspective about such matters will turn on a couple of key suppositions. If it is believed that the angels were confirmed in holiness immediately following the trial of Satan, then one will tend to think of them as being perfectly undisturbed by the devil's suggestions. This isn't to say that they wouldn't loathe sin, but that their thoughts would be so completely anchored in holiness, uncertainty and uneasiness wouldn't assail them.

⁶⁸ It would also seem that the degree of sorrow is increased when the heart of the one grieving is holy. In the case of the elect angels, their sorrow must have been acutely felt.

Similarly, if it is believed that the angels were wholly untroubled by the future, knowing the plans of God, then one will be less inclined to imagine the angels feeling puzzled or troubled by God's dealings with Satan (and vice versa). In other words, if they were made aware of the script of history, then the elements of suspense and surprise, even tension, would be largely factored out of the emotional equation. The story of redemption wouldn't be quite as intense. It would be like watching a movie for the second time.

Of course, when it's put like this, a person is going to be less inclined to side with the perspective that casts redemption in boring terms, as if the angels were yawning at each major epoch.

So what, if anything, does the Bible say? Is there any evidence pointing one way or the other? Are the angels, if one might be so bold, equally as concerned with the problem of evil as we are?

Angelic Assurance

I have long ago learned to turn to Edwards when I'm grappling with a tough theological question. Time and time again, he's proven immensely helpful. Few equal the rigor and depth of his expositions. Just about the time I think I'm asking a fresh question, he'll not only address it, but answer it with incredible insight. The subject of angels is no exception.

Regarding the present set of questions, Edwards has much to say. In a section entitled "Miscellaneous Observations," Edwards, perhaps more than anywhere else,⁶⁹ explores the subject of angels, and primarily that of their confirmation and fall. Under a heading entitled *Angels confirmed*, he begins with this sentence:

⁶⁹ "The Wisdom of God Displayed in the Way of Salvation" and "Christ Exalted" provides further insight into the perspective of Edwards, though not as extensively.

“The angels that stood are doubtless confirmed in holiness, and their allegiance to God; so that they never will to sin, and they are out of every danger of it.”

After reading the above, the trajectory of Edwards’ position appears to be clear. But in a surprising move, he immediately goes on to say:

“But yet I believe God makes use of means to confirm them. They were confirmed by the sight of the terrible destruction that God brought upon the angels that fell. They see what a dreadful thing it is to rebel. They were further confirmed by the manifestation God had made of his displeasure against sin, by the eternal damnation of reprobates among men, and by the amazing discovery of his holy jealousy and justice in the sufferings of Christ... and by the new and greater manifestations of the glory of God, which have been successively made in heaven, and by his dispensations towards the church, and above all, by the work of redemption by Jesus Christ.”⁷⁰

Here it is plain that Edwards widens the scope of the angels’ confirmation to a point well beyond the time of Satan’s rebellion. Their confirmation didn’t happen in one fell swoop. God, it is urged, utilized means, and that over an extended period of time.

What a staggering thought! Edwards teaches that the angels were not ultimately confirmed in holiness until the apex of God’s demonstration of grace and justice, namely, the crucifixion of His Son, Jesus Christ. Put bluntly, and in Edwards’ own words, “the highest heavens was not a place of such happiness and rest before Christ’s ascension as it was afterwards; for the angels were not till then confirmed.”⁷¹ And again, “But when their time of probation was at an end, and they had the reward of certain confirmation by

⁷⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *Miscellaneous Observations in The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, volume 2, 2000), 604.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 607.

having eternal life absolutely made certain to them, is in some degree uncertain. However, there are many things that make it look exceedingly probable to me, that whenever this was done, it was through the Son of God, that he was the immediate dispenser of this reward, and that they received it of the Father through him.”⁷²

The evidence Edwards presents in defense of his position is varied and detailed. Some of it depends on his own nuanced view of the fall of Satan, which differs in a number of important respects from that of my own.⁷³ Nevertheless, while some of the reasons adduced in favor of a delayed confirmation are peculiar to his view of the nature of Satan’s first sin, a substantial portion of his arguments align nicely with the view of this author. In fact, anyone reading carefully through Ephesians or Colossians will have to wrestle with this issue, as there are a number of texts that raise some truly interesting questions about angels.

Let us consider a few.

And Heaven?

Sometimes the Bible jolts us with the unexpected. Colossians 1:16-20 is surely one such place. Paul writes,

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

⁷² Ibid., 612.

⁷³ See Appendix A, where I explore Edwards’ view and offer a critique. I would, however, urge the reader to first digest the position advanced in this work.

Did you catch that? It's in the last verse. It's a simple addition, but one that causes a double-take. Paul writes that all things will be reconciled to Christ, whether things on earth *or things in heaven!* Things in heaven? Did he say that? Yes, and if that weren't enough, this reconciling power is rooted in the peace accomplished through "the blood of the cross," or the death of Christ.

Students of Scripture are certainly accustomed to affirming the reconciling nature of the cross for men, but angels? This is at first blush, and even second blush, hard to understand. What in the world does Paul mean? We know that demons aren't going to be saved, so it can't be referring to them in a salvific sense. It is also know that the elect angels haven't sinned, so how could an atonement made in behalf of men apply?

Here someone may try to side step the issue by interpreting "things in heaven" in non-angelic terms. But this proves difficult. Over and over again, Paul appeals to the heavenly hosts, or angels, using this same basic language (Compare Ephesians 1:10, 20, 2:6, 3:10, 15, 6:12). Moreover, "all things" doesn't leave a lot of wiggle room. The most natural reading points to angels.

So what in the world is being taught? Consider the good Puritan Doctor again. Edwards answers succinctly:

"By this it appears that it was the design of God to so exalt and glorify his Son, that all his intelligent creatures should in every thing be after him, inferior to him, subject to him, and dependent on him, and should have all their fullness, all their supplies from him, and in him."⁷⁴

He explains further in another place, arguing:

"If this be understood only to extend to men; yet, if it be one thing wherein God wills that his Son should in all things have the pre-eminence, and that all fullness should dwell in him,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 615.

that it is by him that men are brought to an union with God; why would it not be another, that by him the angels also are brought to their confirmed union with him, when it is plainly implied in what the apostle says, that it is the Father's design that Christ should in all things have the pre—eminence with respect to *the angels* as well as with respect to *men*, and that both angels and men should have all their fullness in him? If they have their *fullness* in him, I do not see how it can be otherwise than that they should have their reward and eternal life and blessedness in him.”⁷⁵

While one may admit to feeling less than certain about his answer, as this subject is only touched upon here and there in Scriptures (and that in a foggy manner), Edwards makes good sense, especially when a number of related texts are strung together. According to Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ was so pivotal, so monumentally significant, its implications cannot be restricted merely to the affairs of men. It impacts every square inch of reality. Every molecule! The Lordship of Christ cascades through the universe leaving nothing untouched.

Consider a handful of passages in this respect. Note the scope and universality of Paul's words. Read them with an eye trained on the question of angels. Ask yourself if there's something right about Edwards' perspective.

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph 1:9-10)

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers... that you may know... what is the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 613.

immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Eph 1:16-23)

“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)” (Eph 4:7-10)

“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” (Col 2:9-10)

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Php 2:9-11)

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1 Peter 3:21-22)

“And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Mat 28:18)

Many will no doubt gladly affirm the unique Lordship of Jesus Christ, but will nevertheless feel uneasy about making the jump from Christ's reign to the bestowal of the reward of eternal life unto angels. This is understandable. And yet, there's something right and true lurking behind those texts, a truth that does in fact correlate the cross of Christ to both men and angels. Isn't that, after all, what Colossians 1:19-20 is saying?

Now the relationship of the cross between these two societies (men and angels) no doubt differs greatly, but there will nevertheless remain a centrality of interest to both. This appears to flow quite naturally from Christ's having gathered all the spirits in heaven, and angels, and the church on earth into one family and government. He is Head of all. And His fullness extends to all and fills all. All grace is mediated through Him.

With this in mind, here is how Edwards explains the relationship of the cross to both men and angels:

“Here we may take occasion to observe the sweet harmony that there is between God’s dispensations, and particularly the analogy and agreement there is between his dealings with the angels and his dealings with mankind; that though one is innocent and the other guilty, the one having eternal life by a covenant of grace, the other by a covenant of works, yet both have eternal life by his Son Jesus Christ God man, and both, through different ways, by the humiliation and sufferings of Christ; the one as the price of life, the other as the greatest and last trial of their steadfast and persevering obedience. Both have eternal life through different ways, by their adherence, and voluntary submission, and self-dedication to Christ crucified, and he is made the Lord and King of both, and head of communication, influence, and enjoyment of both, and a head of confirmation to both, for as the angels have confirmed life in and by Christ, so have the saints: all that are united in this head have in him a security of perseverance.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Ibid., 615.

While theologians may puzzle over some of the details of Edwards position, one cannot help but think he's heading in the right direction.

To sum up, the angels weren't immediately confirmed in righteousness, but successively grew in their knowledge and assurance of God, seeing His mighty acts against the power of sin and the kingdom of darkness. Confirmation occurred, therefore, through stages, not a single zap. Questions were answered. Further insights into God's glory were displayed. Paradoxes were resolved.

To better understand what is meant here, recall one of the names of Satan. In Revelation 12:10, Satan is referred to as the accuser, because he continually reminds God of the sins of His people. But why? Why would Satan continue to harp on this point? The reason is that the apparent lack of justice appeared to reveal a defect in God's character.

Imagine the Accuser pointing his finger at God and hissing, "He's inconsistent! He claims to be just, but overlooks the sins of the pitiful humans. He leaves them unpunished! Oh, yes, there are times when He pours out His wrath, but can you not see that He is capricious, acting only when it suits His whims? Just look at how He overlooks the sins of His people. Yes, they shed the blood of bulls and goats, but what difference does the blood of some animal make? It does nothing! It is arbitrary, I tell you, inconsistent and unjust. And yet He claims to be righteous, no?"⁷⁷

And on goes the argument.⁷⁸

The scary thing about his argument is that it had bite. Behind the blasphemy, a genuine concern was raised. The elect angels surely wondered how it could be resolved. Justice required God to judge sin, after all. And yet, not only did God overlook sin, but He set His love on many, showing mercy and grace, pouring out abundant blessings.

⁷⁷ See Romans 3:25-26

⁷⁸ Consider the opening chapter of Job. It would seem that Satan enjoyed needling God's people. And note as well that his accusations were aired in an open fashion within the courts of heaven.

But how could He do that?

The answer to this question wouldn't come for a very long time. But when it did unfold, the angels rejoiced like they had never rejoiced before, because the tension they once felt melted away in the face of God's amazing solution, thereby creating a greater sense of awe and wonder of God.⁷⁹

The Secret Things of the Lord

If what has been said is even remotely true, it follows that the faithful angels were held in suspense and were supremely interested in seeing how God would refute Satan's claims. A detailed account of the General's battle plans weren't handed out at the beginning of the war. They had to walk (or fly!) by faith. Here one might say that history is both a theatre and a theatre of war.

Regarding the angel's overall ignorance of God's redemptive, and therefore Satan-refuting plans, the Scriptures are fairly clear. It would seem odd for Paul to say that God is demonstrating His manifold wisdom to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms, if they were already fully schooled on the subject (Eph 3:10). The point of the passage is to say that they haven't yet graduated, for class is still very much in session.

One need only back up to verse 9 to obtain another bit of evidence. There Paul remarks that he is now bringing to light the plan of the mystery which has been hidden for ages in God. Here we may note that the term "light" suggests former darkness, or at least deep shadows. Add to this the use of the word "mystery" with "hidden." These two words are holding hands in the passage. It wasn't simply a mystery, but a hidden mystery.

Now before pointing out, perhaps, the most crucial piece of evidence establishing the hiddenness of God's redemptive plans, the

⁷⁹ As Edwards has stated, "God may suffer innocent creatures to be in trouble for their greater happiness." *Ibid.*, 607. A more simple example might help here. Do we not cheer all the more when a football team makes an amazing and unexpected comeback?

absolute hiddenness of this mystery will be called into question. Some will no doubt object, and object rightly, that the gospel wasn't completely veiled. It had been foretold. As such, men were expected to recognize the Messiah. To deny this would be to eviscerate Jesus' words, as well as the apologetic of the apostles, that the Jews should have known from the OT Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer and enter glory (Luke 24:25-27, 24:44-47; Acts 3:18-24, 17:3, 26:22-23). While this is true, one must be careful not to diminish other texts which equally maintain the essential hiddenness of the gospel (Romans 16:25-26; Colossians 1:26).

The resolution to this apparent problem is probably best observed in the doxology of Romans. There the apostle Paul writes,

“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (Rom 16:25-27)

Here Paul maintains that the revelation of the mystery was kept secret for long ages. It was hidden. Concealed. Tucked away. If we are going to be honest with the text, it's hard to take it any other way. Yet we dare not stop there. He goes on to say that it is now disclosed. But note what it is disclosed through: the prophetic writings!

Wait a minute! The prophetic writings aren't hidden. They're revealed, written on parchments, meant to be read and understood. So what is Paul saying?

In a phrase, the mystery was hidden in plain sight. It was all right there, foretold and prefigured in diverse ways for the people.

While this is true, the coming of the Messiah shed new light on these very same writings, providing a fresh, interpretive grid through which these texts could be viewed. Only after the advent of

Christ would men more fully understand the significance and proper intention of so many texts. Types and shadows point to truths beyond themselves, but these truths are difficult to trace out before the dawn of their fulfillment. This is surely what Paul had in mind when he talked about the mystery being brought to light. The Son illuminates the meaning.

Here we would do well to recall the words of Peter describing the OT prophets,

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

There is another factor to keep in mind in all of this. The spiritual dullness of men prevented them from perceiving what they should have understood. Here one is reminded of Jesus’ words to the two on the road to Emmaus, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25)! How many times did the disciples fail to understand Jesus’ words for want of spiritual insight, or puzzle over His statements, shrugging their shoulders, whispering among themselves, “So, uh, what’s that mean?” Did not Jesus chide them at times for being dull?

Not all fell into this camp, however. Here one might recall the devout and illuminated Simeon waiting patiently in the Temple for the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25-32). Yet even Simeon, it would seem, based on his prayer, wasn’t fully cognizant of the Lord’s plans. He surely would have been just as amazed as the disciples on Easter morning.

So to reiterate, it was a mystery in plain sight.

Returning now to Ephesians 3:9, Paul writes that the mystery was hidden in God. Focus on the word “in.” It was in God’s mind. It was His plan. And He didn’t reveal it until the appointed time. This thought is reflected in 1 Corinthians 2:7-9, where the apostle reflects on the meaning of Isaiah 64:4 and applies it to the message they were preaching. He writes,

“But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’” (1Co 2:6-9).

This passage of Scripture is often thought to say something about the wonders of heaven awaiting us. But that isn’t its import. The reference to Isaiah is applied to the advent of Christ, a first century reality.

Regarding the nature of this event, the apostle writes that they were imparting a secret and hidden wisdom of God. Here the hiddenness of the mystery is again maintained. Interestingly, Paul draws a parallel between the words of Isaiah and the inscrutability of God’s plans. For him the two are obviously related, which is to say that the hiddenness was so complete that no one foresaw what was coming, so far as the work of His Son is concerned.

It appears entirely agreeable, therefore, given the universality of the apostle’s argument, that no one, not even the angels, nor anything else in all creation, knew exactly what was planned. With respect to the apostles, they only grasped its meaning because, as Paul goes on to say, “God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (vs. 10).

Based on the hiddenness of the mystery, and the inscrutability of God’s mind (Romans 11:34), along with the ever watchful and

inquisitive eyes of the angels,⁸⁰ Dr. Goodwin draws the correct conclusion and sums up the matter nicely when he writes,

“This doctrine of the gospel he kept hid and close in his own breast; not a creature knew it; no, not the angels, who were his nearest courtiers and dearest favorites; it lay hid *in* God... A mystery, which when it should be revealed, should amaze the world, put the angels to school again, as if they had known nothing in comparison of this, wherein they should know over again all those glorious riches which are in God, and that more perfectly and fully than ever yet.”⁸¹

Angels Long to Look into These Things

The angels have been perched atop our globe, like birds on a lofty branch, craning their necks to see what God would do next. Peter says nothing less,

“It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.” (1 Peter 1:12)

Rather curiously, the term used in Peter 1:12, which speaks of the angel’s longing (*epithumeō*) to look into the affairs of God’s redemptive efforts, is a potent word. It means to set one’s heart on something; in a negative sense it can be used to describe lusting after or coveting. When our Lord said that a man commits adultery when he lusts after a woman in his heart, the same Greek word is used. The same term likewise appears in the account of Lazarus,

⁸⁰ Daniel 4:17 refers to “watchers,” which are most likely angelic beings. If this is so, then their tendency to peer and observe must be such that they can be aptly called watchers.

⁸¹ Quoted in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 607.

who sat at the gate of the rich man longing (epithumeō) to pick up scraps from the rich man's table (Luke 16:21).

Of course, if the very meaning of everything was at stake, having been called into question by Satan, and if the kingdom of darkness had made impressive gains, having spread its borders over the earth, the intensity of the angel's interest in God's response should come as no surprise. What else could be more important?

Here I cannot help but think of my own journey. I have wanted answers to the big questions of life since about the age of twenty. It has been eighteen years now, digging and searching and wrestling with God, knocking on the doors of Scripture, feeling at times confused and burdened with doubt, while at other times, joyous and overwhelmed with a sense of God's majesty. To me it feels like a substantial portion of time. Over half of my life. And yet, it is but a drop in the bucket, a mere wisp of time.

Oh, to think that the angels have been investigating such matters for eons! A decade of my life isn't even equivalent to a millennium of theirs. And to think that they are still learning, that it is all wonderfully glorious and exciting, and that the answers they have tasted satisfy their deepest longings (Rev 4-5).

Here I am also reminded of the power of stories. There's something within me that longs for the wonders of another realm and the grand unfolding of a well crafted tale. Isn't that part of the appeal of an epic like *The Lord of the Rings*? Life for the little Hobbits proved to be much greater than they ever anticipated. They journeyed across distant lands, met exotic creatures, and interacted with strange cultures. But there was more than interesting sights for them. An epic story involving good and evil was unfolding. They were caught up in it, not like a librarian hunched over a book, but as participants, being drawn deeper and deeper into its exhilarating currents.

That is our life. It is part of a much larger story, the grandest of stories, where the greatest conceivable implications are at stake. Each jot and tittle of humanities' actions is saturated with infinite meaning. Everything down to the eating of food and the drinking from cups proves meaningful. Indeed, each decision

explodes with a geometry of effects that are being threaded together into the boundless tapestry of God's will (Eph 1:11). As Paul writes, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36).

Of course, many would insist that this is merely begging the question. Satan, for one, would certainly demur.

This brings the matter back full circle to that most fundamental question: Is God alone God? Will every knee bow and will every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord?

Yes, God has said so (Phil 2:10).

And He has proven that it will be so. Even now.

The question is how?

The Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent

In order to set the stage for the second half of this work where we delve into God's multi-faceted refutation of sin, we must return again to the Garden, to that moment when Adam plunged the human race into sin.

It has been argued that the elect angels were immensely concerned with the outcome of the first man's and woman's interaction with the devil. It has also been noted how the weight of the situation must have been keenly felt. The failure of Adam wasn't merely an occasion for slight disappointment, as if the hosts of heaven would simply shrug their shoulders, click their tongues and move on, but that it rather carried with it profound war-time implications. The enemy planted his flag in the heart of man. Territory was lost. And perhaps most startling of all was the fact that God allowed it to happen, thereby bolstering, at least on the face of things, the claims of Satan.

Much was at stake for Satan as well. His performance, the veracity of his idea, his personal greatness- all of it was wrapped up with his ability to validate the strength of his position. He had to show that he was in fact a god. Angelic eyes were watching. If the humans stood firm, he would have been made to look like a fool.

He would have been expelled by a creature of inferior stock. The thought of having to scurry away at the command of a man would have been intolerable. Therefore, when Satan seduced Adam, he surely felt stronger than ever, gloating and blaspheming. The coals of pride must have been burning very hot indeed.

But the rejoicing was soon cut short. Not by a mighty display of power, interestingly enough, nor by a sudden angelic attack, but it was cut short by the pronouncement of a short, cryptic promise. It came when God confronted Adam and Eve. He began by saying this:

“The LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel’” (Gen 3:14-15).

Herein marks the announcement of God’s plan. A promise of defeat for Satan, a word of assurance to the angels, and a message of hope for fallen humanity are given. It is all contained here in kernel form.⁸²

The significance of this passage can scarcely be overstated. In one short statement the underlying theme and meaning of history is laid bare. Whatever one says about the history of mankind, whether they’re looking at the specks of some seemingly insignificant incident, or the grand movements of a mighty nation, if this overarching perspective is fundamentally absent from their

⁸² Generals fiercely guard their military strategies, not wanting anything to leak out, lest the enemy learn something of their intentions and adjust their plans. But it is not so with the Lord of hosts. He forecasts His moves, and like the hand in Belshazzar’s chamber, Satan’s doom is foretold. “He shall bruise your head.” It will happen. Someone born of a woman will crush you. In a subtle way, this demonstrates that God is not threatened by autonomy.

thinking, the task of making sense of human experience, whether it be the past or the present or the future, will inevitably fail to reflect reality. As a result, the historian's work of collating facts into a meaningful whole will run astray.⁸³ If Genesis 3:15 is true, then this fact cannot be otherwise. We exist in a reality with a history that is rooted in a story that is moving towards a definite end.

Given the importance of this pivotal declaration from God, we should pause and consider briefly four truths that spin out of the text.

Observation One: *Two Kingdoms*

In its most basic form, world history is a clash of two kingdoms.

In Genesis 3:15, the division between these two kingdoms is made explicit. There is "your offspring" and "her offspring;" Satan's kingdom and God's kingdom; the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light (Col 1:13; John 18:36; 1 John 2:15-16).

It would take some time for this concept to fully materialize, but even in its earliest days, a division of allegiances would be clear to both men and angels. Abel is illustrative. He offered a better sacrifice than Cain, thereby showing a difference in heart commitment to God (Heb 11:4). Satan no doubt considered this pious man to be the "seed of the woman" who would dare crush his head. Intent on squelching the threat, he influenced Cain to murder Abel (1 John 3:12), thereby exercising one of the powers of sin (Heb 2:14), namely death. But immediately after this incident, we read in Genesis 4:26 that Eve bore another son named Seth who in turn bore a son named Enosh. Here the Scriptures teach that "at that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD." God

⁸³ For example, is our history a Neo-Darwinian tale of tooth and claw, an evolutionary struggle of biological progress; or might it be the cyclical view of the Greeks; or perhaps Hegel's endless and anti-climactic story of synthesis; or perhaps it is Marx's vision of a triumphant proletariat?

perpetuated a godly line, thereby revealing the existence and ever growing reality of His inbreaking kingdom.

Observation Two: *Enmity*

This brings us to the second observation. The relationship between these two kingdoms would be one of marked hostility. As God put it, “I will put enmity between you and the woman.”

This enmity isn’t of a casual sort, as if the citizens of each kingdom are at a ballgame rooting for a different team. The antipathy and opposition would be nothing less than absolute, resulting in the shedding of blood and even the taking of life. It is warlike hostility (Rev 11:7, 12:7, 13:7, 19:11-19). It should be thought of in terms of swords and shields, not empty threats or an unwillingness to attend the same social event.

At the command of God, Joshua and David, key leaders in God’s kingdom, annihilated entire cities. Heads of enemy leaders would be literally chopped off, their bodies hacked to pieces (1 Sam 15:33, 17:51). Of course, God didn’t command them to do anything falling outside the pale of His own just actions. Here one need only recall the choking cries of the world during the days of Noah, or the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

While Satan’s motives wouldn’t be propelled by justice, he nevertheless utilized and employed the sword, as well as other instruments of destruction, against the people of God. As the author of Hebrews writes,

“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-- of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb 11:35-38).

The nature of this hostility certainly carries with it an emotional component. God hates sin and Satan hates holiness. Here the emotional component is intrinsically linked to the ideological nature of the enmity. The disagreement isn't over one issue, or even four issues, but a totality of issues. It is a conflict of worldviews. There is real antithesis.

This is why Paul can say, for example, that "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:7-8). Jesus likewise taught that "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Mat 6:24, see also John 15:18-19).

This antithesis is so complete that the children of the Serpent cannot stand to even hear God speak. As Stephen said to the men of the synagogue of the Freedmen, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered" (Act 7:51-52). Rather ironically, his listeners grew enraged and stoned him to death (Acts 7:54-60).

There will be no terms of compromise in this war; no reconciliation of the governments; no fading feelings. God declared that He would crush the head of the serpent, thereby announcing in pictorial fashion, the final defeat of Satan. The cross would eventually deal the fatal blow, and in due time, the devil will be thrown into the lake of fire forever.

It should be stated clearly. The conflict is total and irreconcilable, and all of humanity occupies one of the two camps. There are no casual observers in the stadium of life.

Observation Three: *Reclamation*

Implicit in God's declaration is an unwillingness to forfeit the earth, as well as a portion of the inhabitants of the earth to Satan. Like the kingdom of God, this concept of repossession would develop and mature over time, culminating, ultimately, in a creative act whereby the very heavens and the earth are purified and made new (Isaiah 65:17ff; Rev 21:1ff). The new earth isn't designed to be an empty abode full of sweet smelling flowers, but it's specifically crafted for a people who are nothing less than new creations themselves (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:20-21). Therefore, as is hinted at in the phrase "seed of the woman," God is intent on redeeming a people from among the mass slave market of fallen humanity. As Peter writes in his first epistle, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1Pe 2:9).

The story of redemption is a story of reversals.

Here the words of Satan to Jesus in the wilderness are more than a little provocative and relevant. Taking Jesus to a very high mountain, Satan bid the Messiah to consider the splendor of the kingdoms of this world. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." (Matthew 4:9)

Asking Jesus to worship him was absurd.⁸⁴ But was it absurd for him to offer the kingdoms of the world as a reward? Could he legitimately present this to Jesus, or was it a bold faced lie?

Some believe that it was nothing more than a lie. And why not? Satan is a liar *par excellence*. Moreover, doesn't Psalm 24:1 say that "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein"?

Satan is a liar. And the earth is the Lord's. Nevertheless, as with so many biblical doctrines, one must allow the totality of the biblical data to nuance specific texts. God as Creator owns the deed to the world. This world, however, has become infected with sin,

⁸⁴ Although, when one pauses to consider the cross and all it would entail, the offer of Satan, which might appear to circumvent such a path, served to tempt Christ.

and is occupied by foreign armies. It is this latter fact that allows Satan to, in a very real sense, offer the kingdoms of the world to Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).

Unlike the first Adam, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, overcomes Satan's temptations and subdues the foul beast, thereby reclaiming all rights to the world. As the God-man, this king will eradicate evil and expand his kingdom to the four corners of the globe, effectively driving out Satan's presence. In the end, every enemy will be made Christ's footstool (Heb 10:12-13), and the world will be made right again.

Observation Four: *Ignominy*

The serpent is going to be crushed, and it's going to be done in a way that abases him, even humiliates him. This is seen in the curse God pronounces upon the serpent. The text reads, "On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life" (Gen 3:14).

The idea of being brought low or humbled is bound up with the concept of being made to crawl along the ground and eat dust. It is a phrase designed for one's enemies.

Similar expressions are used elsewhere in Scripture. While invoking blessings for the Davidic throne, the psalmist declares, "May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust" (Psa 72:8-9)!

A similar thought is expressed in the seventh chapter of Micah,

"The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf; they shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds; they shall turn in dread to the LORD our God,

and they shall be in fear of you.” (Mic 7:16-17; See also Isaiah 49:23; Psalm 44:25).

With their usual insight, Keil-Delitzsch explains the matter this way,

“Going upon the belly was a mark of the deepest degradation... Although this punishment fell literally upon the serpent, it also affected the tempter in a figurative and symbolical sense. He became the object of the utmost contempt and abhorrence; and the serpent still keeps the revolting image of Satan perpetually before the eye.”⁸⁵

It is this theme of “deepest degradation” that most threatens the proud. Suffering defeat is an unpleasant thing. But there is no greater pain for those with a haughty spirit than to suffer the sting of defeat, while being made to look like a fool. As Martin Luther once quipped, “The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.”⁸⁶

Indeed, the proud cannot bear to be mocked. It is for this reason that God causes the devil to lick the dust.

The Unfolding Plan

In all of this, the engagement of two kingdoms, the redemptive plan, the strategy of abasement, one must not suppose that God’s response to Satan is restricted to one pride-decimating moment in time. The crushing blow promised in Genesis certainly centers on the Messiah’s death, but the history of redemption is littered with micro examples. At each turn of the unfolding drama,

⁸⁵ Keil-Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 1980, volume 1), 99.

⁸⁶ Cited by C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), pre-introduction pages.

significant truths are taught. Lessons are shown through individual lives and entire nations, singular defeats as well as grand victories. Nothing is insignificant in this story. The details form a whole. The threads compose a tapestry.

Ephesians 3:10 glows again with significance. God is displaying his manifold wisdom to the universe. He's showing that His ways are better than Satan's. God is going to cut Satan down, not by the sheer strength of his might, which would be easy enough, but by exposing the utter folly and bankruptcy of sin. This tactic requires tremendous wisdom. One must not only conceive of a plan whereby Satan's best is turned against him, but he must be able to execute it to perfection. That is the mark of true greatness. Wonderfully, that is God's plan.

The Consent of all the Parts

We are now ready to focus our attention on God's response. In so doing, it should be noted that our investigation into the nature of Satan's original sin has not come to an end. While the focus of this study will certainly shift, an important point remains. As is the case with nearly all theories, a good test of their accuracy and truthfulness rests in their explanatory power. How well does the theory account for all the facts? Does it bring greater clarity, or does it feel like it's trying to push a square peg through a round hole?

Near the beginning of this work, the rationale behind Satan's awful idea was divided into six categories. Through the power of autonomy, Lucifer believed he could attain attributes mirroring and exceeding those of God. The convictions were labeled as follows:

- Satanic Omnipotence
- Satanic Omniscience
- Satanic Creation
- Satanic Joy

- Satanic Authority
- Satanic Glory

If the contours of Lucifer's position have been accurately identified, and if God is intent on demonstrating the folly Satan's position, then one would expect to find a refutation of each point in the architecture of history. Interestingly, that is exactly what is found. Through the varieties of life and the clash of kingdoms, God exposes the gaping holes in Satan's armor.

So, for example, if Satan believes he can trump God's will through a power called autonomy, God demonstrates the glories of His will by turning Satan's own designs against him. If Satan believes there are pleasures to be found through sin, God uncovers their bitter taste. If Satan believes there is wisdom to be found outside of God, the Lord proves that foolishness, not wisdom, is gained. If Satan believes that he can attain new heights of glory, God reveals that ignominy alone awaits those who boast in themselves. God is not mocked. He will not give His glory to another. All the supposed glories of sin will be exposed as fraudulent, and He will vindicate the absolute truth found in Isaiah 45:22, "I am God, and there is no other."

In the second part of this work, a twofold approach will therefore be adopted. On the one hand, the objective will be to highlight the terrible implications of sin and examine God's marvelous response to it. On the other hand, the terrible implications of sin, as well as God's marvelous response, begs to be understood in light of the theory advanced in this book.

In this vein, attention will be paid to how God specifically refutes each of the pillars supporting Satan's awful idea. This will be done by breaking the concepts down into individual chapters and addressing them in turn. To the degree that each facet of the awful idea appears to be genuinely connected with history and

God's purposes (by way of refutation), the theory's veracity is bolstered.⁸⁷

Part two of this work will, therefore, begin with the satanic promise of life. While this isn't specifically named as a pillar, it functions as a kind of glue. Sin promises life. It boasts of offering a better path. This was promised to Adam and Eve. From here satanic joy (or the matter of pleasure) will be explored. Following that the subjects of wisdom and epistemology, autonomy and glory, and other related issues, will be taken up in turn.

⁸⁷ As I have wrestled with this subject, two things have especially drawn me towards the perspective advanced in this work. The first has already been mentioned early on. It arose out of the simple question: How could the pride of one angel convince others to commit treason?

The second contributing factor is of a different type, and while it's been hinted at here and there, it has yet to be stated formally. This point emerges out of the big picture of God's dealings with sin. There's something peculiar about the manner in which God has dealt with Satan's kingdom. The term that seems most appropriate is the word ironic. It is as if the Scriptures are saying time and time again, "Can you not see the irony of sin?"

Irony is a carefully crafted art. Where it occurs with frequency and with obvious design, one must ask what the author is up to. So it is with God. Throughout redemptive history, the nature of sin is exposed in a mockingly ironical way, where autonomy is shown to purchase the exact opposite of what it promises. In the case of the six tenets of Satan's idea, Scripture is replete with said examples. Now without an overarching perspective, these examples might appear to be nothing more than isolated occurrences, interesting moments where the folly of sin is made evident. But it is so much more than this. The story of redemption is a direct and personal response to the Serpent and his seed. Since Satan is the chief advocate of sin, it only makes sense that the various threads of ironic refutation found throughout Scripture share a common purpose. God is both confounding and uncovering the blunder of sin, which was, and is, Satan's awful doctrine.

If this is correct, there is a deep and unifying theme running through the Scriptures, one that stretches from the beginning of Genesis to the last chapters of Revelation. So while the Bible may certainly be a love letter, as some have said, it is also a polemic. It is about God's love *and* God's glory. It is a tale of triumph and defeat.

With this in mind, let us now consider God's glorious acts and say with Jethro, "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods" (Exodus 18:11a).

Part II

~~God Responds~~

Chapter 5

-The Wages of Sin-

It's reported that while attending a divine service on a wintery day, Sir Isaac Newton left in his study a favorite little dog named Diamond. Apparently a candle had been left lit upon his desk, which was situated near a pile of papers containing many years of scientific labor. When Sir Isaac returned home, he found his research reduced to ashes, the candle having been inadvertently knocked over by his little dog.

In one fateful moment, his work was irredeemably lost. When the reality of the situation hit him, Sir Isaac turned to his beloved dog and exclaimed, "Oh, Diamond, Diamond, little do you know the mischief you have caused me!"⁸⁸

For Diamond, it was impossible for him to grasp the magnitude of the loss. In many ways, we are like that dog. Sin is infinitely offensive, and because of our smallness, and our callused hearts, we fail to grasp its seriousness. But on the other hand, our Master has not left us without some very definite knowledge of sin's potency. Instead of saying, "Oh, Adam, Adam, little do you know the mischief you have caused me," God declared, "Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:17b-19).

⁸⁸ *The Life of Sir Isaac Newton* (New York: J & J Harper, 1831), by Sir David Brewster, 203. Mr. Brewster casts some doubt on the authenticity of this event. In either case, whether the account is entirely true or composed of legend, the story serves to illustrate my point.

By cursing the ground, the physical realm has become a tutor, an instructor intent on illuminating the gravity of man's rebellion. Man has been made to feel the weight of his sin. He will know something of its awfulness. As a result, the earth no longer proves hospitable, but is filled with every kind of trouble and toil, causing no end of grief for the human race. Perhaps most remarkable of all, man experiences the due penalty of sin *within* himself, as the icy grip of death infects both body and soul.

The curse would be our first great lesson about sin's true nature.

A Larger Perspective

But it isn't a lesson meant only for men. When the concerns and interests of the angels are borne in mind, one cannot help but wonder if the curse isn't also direct and initial response to the claims of Satan. Did not Satan tell Eve, when he spoke of the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit, "You will not surely die"?

This was the Serpent's promise. At the time of the temptation, this statement was designed to not only call God's word into question, but it was, as would be expected if Satan was peddling another gospel, offering a new way of life. One might call this the satanic promise of life. It is the sum total and promised end of autonomy. "Follow me and you will find abundant life!"

Men have long adopted this as the supreme goal, following their own godless desires, indulging in that which God has forbidden, believing they will be all the happier. In so doing, men are essentially saying, "I want to live apart from God, because sin will prove better."

God's response to Adam, and by extension, His response to all of humanity, is designed to refute this belief. By subjecting the created order to futility, and by allowing sin to work its toxic power in the heart of man, it is as if God is shining a bright light on the

satanic lie. It is as if He is saying, “So you really think you’ll find life? Do you really think sin is a small thing? Let us see.”

It could be said, therefore, that the curse is multi-layered in its purposes. It functions on different levels, addressing sin from a number of important angles. The question is how?

Subjected to Futility

When driven out of the Garden, the lesson and reality of sin’s dire consequences were immediately felt by our first parents. Besides the gnawing anxiety and uncertainty of an alien landscape, one far harsher than the lush quarters of the Garden, the need to scavenge for food became paramount. No longer could they simply reach up and pluck a plump fruit off a low hanging branch. Everyday tasks proved frustrating and exhausting. Insects pestered them at night. Blisters formed on their tender feet. Thorns cut into them. Muscles ached.

But that was only the beginning, as each day brought fresh terrors. Just imagine Adam lying on the ground, shivering with fever, nausea overwhelming him, his body weak and flooded with discomfort, as he fights off a flu virus for the first time. There is Eve, watching with fear and concern, trying to keep her husband warm, unsure of what has stricken him. Or picture Adam watching in horror his wife clawing at the ground, screaming, as the contractions intensify. Would not his mind think back to that moment when they disobeyed God, and how it could have been different? Would he not stand there watching helplessly, even breathlessly, horrified at the process of childbirth?

Terribly, the scroll of sin’s bitter touch would take time to fully unroll. Fast forward and imagine the first deformity; the first person maimed by a bear; the first poisonous spider bite; the first tornado ripping apart a village; the first drowning; the first person born blind or deaf or unable to speak. Imagine the first tooth full of rot; the first lump felt; the first amputation; the first stillborn baby; the first seizure; the first bulging disk; the first compound

fracture; the first asthma attack. Picture the first person to contract cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, Alzheimer's, malaria, tuberculosis, or any of the thousands of other maladies detailed in medical journals.

On and on it goes, horror after horror.

Nature has become something like a ravenous lion. It is beautiful and majestic in its own right, but not at all safe.

Here the words of John Stuart Mill, while reflecting on nature's cruel bent, are worth noting. Drawing a striking parallel with men, he says,

"In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are nature's every day performances. Killing, the most criminal act recognized by human laws, Nature does once to every being that lives; and in a large proportion of cases, after protracted tortures such as only the greatest monsters whom we read of ever purposely inflicted on their living fellow-creatures. If, by an arbitrary reservation, we refuse to account anything murder but what abridges a certain term supposed to be allotted to human life, nature also does this to all but a small percentage of lives, and does it in all the modes, violent or insidious, in which the worst human beings take the lives of one another. Nature impales men, breaks them as if on the wheel, casts them to be devoured by wild beasts, burns them to death, crushes them with stones like the first Christian martyr, starves them with hunger, freezes them with cold, poisons them by the quick or slow venom of her exhalations, and has hundreds of other hideous deaths' in reserve, such as the ingenious cruelty of a Nabis or a Domitian never surpassed... Next to taking life... is taking the means by which we live; and nature does this, too, on the largest scale and with the most callous indifference. A single hurricane destroys the hopes of a season; a flight of locusts, or an inundation, desolates a district; a trifling chemical change in an edible root starves a million of people... Everything, in short, which the worst men

commit either against life or property is perpetuated on a larger scale by natural agents.”⁸⁹

Portraits of Moral Evil

But why? Why is creation, as Paul writes in the eighth chapter of Romans, subjected to futility, bound to corruption, not willingly, as though it desired it, but by the command of God (Romans 8:20-22)? What after all has the ground done? Or the sky? Or the animals? They didn’t sin. So why are they twisted out of shape and made to afflict humanity?

The reason is profoundly simple, and it can be summed up in one sentence:

God has placed the natural world under a curse so that the physical horrors felt and seen by men would become vivid pictures of the horror of moral evil.⁹⁰

That’s it. If a person wants to know how bad sin really is, if they want to gain some true sense of its moral repugnance, they should reflect on physical evil, for it is an epistle of spiritual realities. In much the same way that the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19), so too, but with a different design, natural evil highlights the devastating nature of sin.

Pedagogy

⁸⁹ *Nature, the Utility of Religion, and Theism* (London: Longmans, Green and CO., 1885), 28-30.

⁹⁰ I am indebted to John Piper for this statement. One of the greatest sermons he has ever preached, in my opinion, boldly tackles this theme. It is entitled “The Triumph of the Gospel in the New Heavens and the New Earth,” found at: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/the-triumph-of-the-gospel-in-the-new-heavens-and-the-new-earth>

Men do not naturally sit around and worry over their sin. They do not lament their condition, nor do they discern its due penalty. And if they do perceive some degree of ill, they either exonerate themselves with a wave of the hand, or minimize it so fully so as to safely brush it under a rug.

The curse, one might say, is a partial remedy to this. When a man experiences pain, or suffers in the face of a great tragedy, everything within him boils. He cries out against it. He feels in the very depths of his being a hatred of the thing. He wants it gone.

In that very moment, he is being shown in a vivid way how he should feel about his sin. Do you hate it when an earthquake levels your home? Then you understand how you should feel about sin. Do you hate it when the doctor comes into the examination room with bad news? Then you've just learned how you should feel about sin. When your car breaks down on vacation, can you not see that your outrage is meant to tell you something about your sin?

Along these lines, it's interesting that when Jesus addressed the issue of a tower falling and killing eighteen people, He explained to his audience that those who died in the accident were no worse than all the others who lived in Jerusalem. But then in a surprising move, He goes on to say, "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). Consider likewise Jesus' curious response to the paralytic lowered through the roof, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:5). Moments later, Jesus tells him to rise, pick up his mat, and go home. Whether the sudden tragedy of a collapsed building, or the infirmity of disease, each can be traced back to sin and the curse. Both stand behind all troubles, ultimately. As sinners, these events should cause us to reflect afresh on our spiritual condition. They should drive us towards repentance.

In a moving story told at a conference, John Piper recounted the prayer of a mother he once overheard. By way of background, this particular mom had a seven year old son with serious health problems. His mind was like that of a six month old, and he would seizure every few seconds, straightening and twitching in his wheelchair. The doctors had done everything they knew to do, and

the church likewise prayed and did all they knew to do. But the child remained the same and would probably spend the rest of his life in this terrible state.

During the prayer meeting, Pastor John Piper heard the mother say something incredible. Amazed, he immediately wrote it down, not wanting to forget a single word. The prayer uttered by this saintly woman is a model for us all. Here is what she prayed, “Dear Lord, help me to feel the horror of sin the way I feel the horror of my son’s disability.” After recounting the incident, Piper exclaimed, “Now I just wanted to leap and say, ‘She gets it! Oh, how deeply she gets it!’”⁹¹

But do we get it? Or is the curse some nebulous concept disconnected from our consciousness, as though the troubles we face on this planet are mere happenchance, or just the way things are?⁹²

⁹¹ This story is told in “The Triumph of the Gospel in the New Heavens and New Earth.”

⁹² Far too many Christians fail to provide a biblical answer to the problem of natural evil. The highly educated are especially prone to voicing poor explanations. Here I am reminded of something Paul Copan once said during an interview. While discussing the problem of natural evil, he said this, “The question of natural disasters is a troubling one, because here we know that moral agents aren’t involved in bringing evil upon others. They’re not abusing their freedom and bringing havoc into the lives of other people. But rather this seems, as insurance claims will put it, ‘Acts of God,’ that are bringing havoc into the lives of people... How do we make sense of this? A couple things to keep in mind. Things like tornadoes and hurricanes; these actually serve a purpose... a general purpose to help stabilize the earth’s temperatures, so that things don’t become drastically imbalanced. And so this makes for a habitable earth, rather than one that becomes rapidly uninhabitable. Also even earthquakes. Without tectonic plate shifting and mountain building and the creation of soil through erosion, if we didn’t have tectonic plate shifting, then all the soil would erode off of the continents and no plant life could grow on these continents. So there is a benefit that comes to human beings, but that also means earthquakes are going to be part of that.” (Good God and Evil World, found online at: <http://www.apologetics315.com/2010/06/good-god-evil-world-by-paul-copan-mp3.html>). This is a woefully inadequate explanation. Let us be clear. Our approach to natural evil must be anchored in the Scriptures. If

More times than not, the purpose and nature of the curse is misinterpreted. Flip open nearly any volume discussing the subject of evil, or tune in to the news after a natural disaster, and what does one find? There is shock and outrage. Fair enough. But unto what end? Whether the Oxford scholar or the blue collar employee, the tendency is to cast a doubtful eye towards God, as though the catastrophe somehow disproves His existence, or casts aspersions on His character. "How dare God allow such suffering," it is thought. "How dare He inflict such senseless agony on innocent people," it is decried. For many, natural evil provides an opportunity to indict God. "Let's put God on the stand and judge Him! The evidence is everywhere!"

While such complaints and accusations are varied and could be multiplied at length, only two examples will be cited for the sake of illustration.

The first comes from well known atheist, Sam Harris. While debating Dr. William Craig at Notre Dame about the question of objective morality, he had this to say at one point:

"We're told that God is loving and kind and just and intrinsically good, but when someone like myself points out the rather obvious and compelling evidence that God is cruel and unjust, because He visits suffering on innocent people of a scope and scale that would embarrass the most ambitious psychopath, we're told that God is mysterious... We're being offered a psychopathic and psychotic moral attitude [if we consider God's morality]. It's psychotic because this is completely delusional. There's no reason to believe that we live in a universe ruled by an invisible

Christianity is true, then the biblical answer will provide the most rational explanation.

monster Yahweh. It is psychopathic because this is a total detachment from the wellbeing of human beings. This so easily rationalizes the slaughter of children.”⁹³

Perhaps the most caustic and well known quote comes from Richard Dawkins. Based on his reading of the Scriptures, and his understanding of God’s dealings in the world, Dawkins says the following,

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”⁹⁴

Such scathing indictments may not reflect the sentiments of most, as they would hesitate to articulate their feelings so forthrightly, or avoid cataloging their thoughts so systematically, yet there is, nevertheless, a lingering suspicion, or a clinched fist, a bubbling anger that says, “How dare God do this! How dare He rule so callously?”

For those who point their finger at God and call Him a moral monster, they fail to grasp the irony of the situation. If catastrophes like famines and earthquakes and tsunamis stem from the curse, which is a response to human sin, and if such natural evils are meant to tell us something about the horror of sin, people are, in essence, blaming God for their own moral failings.

But the irony runs even deeper. When men call down judgment on God, are they not tightening the noose around their own necks? They’re invoking a standard of righteousness by which

⁹³ William Lane Craig and Sam Harris debate the topic “Is Good from God.” 2011, Notre Dame. Found online at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqaHXKLRKzg>

⁹⁴ *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 51.

to judge their Maker. But when the tables are turned and they are shown that it was their sin that cursed the earth, could not God redirect their indictments- their burning accusations about His supposed shortcomings and moral failure- back on them? Did not Jesus say, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:1-2)?

If someone condemns God for allowing natural evil, and then it is shown that it is they who are ultimately responsible for the calamity, could not God indict them with their own judgment? Along these lines, Paul writes, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man~you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself~that you will escape the judgment of God" (Rom 2:1-3)?

It will be a terrifying day when the books are opened and men are judged. Their mouths will be stopped, and they will not be able to call God's sentencing into question, for it will often agree with their own former criticisms.

Specific Lessons from the Tutor

If the physical realm is a tutor, a tool meant to tangibly illustrate the awfulness of sin, the groanings of our world will paint an accurate picture of sin, even in terms of specific attributes. We won't be restricted to mere generalizations like, "Sin is bad."

For example, consider the dysfunctional nature of sin. When a cancer cell goes rogue and attempts to consume a person from the inside, infecting organs while replicating at an alarming rate, does this not teach us that sin fails to promote the wellbeing and wholeness of man? It invades and tears us apart. It introduces disharmony, throws peace out of orbit. The goodness of creation is infected with a virus, so to speak, and as a result nothing quite

works as it ought too. The microbial world is impacted, thus resulting in disease. The human body is affected, thereby incurring decay. And the earth itself foment disaster, as it cannot help but thrash about like a wounded animal. Discord and frustration abounds, and it can be traced directly back to sin.

Sin is also chaotic. Few things are more disorienting than a natural disaster. In the aftermath of a devastating tsunami or a vicious hurricane, images of people standing amid the wreckage, hands hanging loosely by their sides, faces blank with shock, capture our attention. Perhaps someone is sitting atop the remains of their home, head against their bent knees, tears streaming down. The world is swirling at that moment. Nothing makes sense. Chaos roars.

The Scriptures tell us that God is not a God of confusion, but of peace (1 Cor 14:33). So in the original goodness of the created world, disorder was absent. Only when sin reared its ugly head did men experience upheaval. This means that sin, in its very essence, produces chaos.

Here one is reminded of the flood. Due to the exceedingly wicked behavior of men, as every intention of their hearts were evil continually (Gen 6:5), God sent a mighty deluge, thereby killing everyone, save Noah and his family. Interestingly, throughout the Scriptures, the raging waters of the sea are often associated with ungodly nations (Ezekiel 26:3; Dan 7:3; Jer 6:23, 49:23). It is an apt metaphor, as the continual churning of the water speaks of disquietude and restlessness. Isaiah is particularly clear when he writes, "But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked" (Isa 57:20-21, see also Rev 17:15). This explains why John can say that in the New Heavens and New Earth "the sea was no more" (Rev 21:1). By that point, evil will have been dispelled and the curse lifted.

When the flood burst forth and the face of the earth was covered, judgment and the churning chaos of water were visibly linked. It's as if God started creation over, and as a result, the planet was made to resemble the primordial earth when it was

without form and void, and the Spirit was hovering over the waters (Gen 1:2). One might say that sin regresses from order to chaos. It leads to de-creation and entails disorder.

Besides being both dysfunctional and chaotic, sin is also aggressive and terrifying. Animals now bare their teeth and claw their prey, insects bite and sting, and parasites invade. Merely consider the infamous guinea worm. It is a horrific creature. After being consumed through contaminated water, it lies dormant in its host until at last it pushes its way out through a painful blister, intent on releasing thousands of larvae. Villagers often wrap its head around a stick and slowly extract it. They are sometimes three feet long and cause even the hardiest of men to shudder.

Nature programs like *Planet Earth* or *Life* are truly amazing. The vast complexity and wonderful array of the earth's creatures defies description. But intermingled with the beauty is a war-like animosity that stretches from the smallest beetle to the largest mammal. The entire animal kingdom convulses with enmity. Ants swarm. Spiders lie in wait. Jackals hunt. It is true that the ecosystem with its cycle of life remains largely in balance, and is a wonder, but it is an awful wonder, and a testament to sustaining grace. Thankfully, this will change someday. The wolf, we are told, will graze with the lamb, thus foretelling a time when life will be harmonious again (Isaiah 65:25).

In all this, one might say that our world is carefully balanced between heaven and hell. The full weight of hell is held at bay, but its heat is certainly felt. In the same way, the consummation of the kingdom isn't yet here, but grace is present. We stand on a sliding continuum. Neither is present in their full strength. Our world is a curious and instructive intermingling of life and death.

To Dust You Shall Return

What is true of the external world is likewise true of the inner man. Having been banished from the tree of life and

alienated from God, the life-giving root was severed, and Adam experienced within himself the sentence of death.

If ever there was something that should serve to refute Satan's promise of life, it is death. "The wages of sin," says the Scriptures, "is death" (Romans 6:23). Not life, but death. Every man and woman born into this world will personally face and experience the natural outworking of sin. They will, in one way or another, die. It is inevitable.⁹⁵

While studies vary, estimates show that 150,000 people perish each day. That is 56 million individuals each year. In order to grasp the magnitude of such loss, try to picture every person dying in New York and California. Imagine each street in those states vacant one year from now. No pedestrians. No occupied homes. Everything is empty. That's how many hearts stop. And it happens year after year.

Our world is truly a factory farm of death.

This morbid fact isn't without its own lesson. As each candle of life is snuffed out, it is as if the grave is shouting, "Sin fails! It fails to impart life!"

Try to imagine things from the perspective of the angels. They have been watching men die for ages upon ages. In each and every case, man is not able to summon the strength to overcome the deadly sting of sin. Sooner or later, they fall.

What a powerful apologetic this must be in the minds of the angels. Satan's boast has been discounted literally billions of times. It is a second by second refutation. Whatever means he might employ, he cannot impart one ounce of life apart from God. It is a power completely unavailable to him.

But why is that? What is it about sin that leads inexorably to death? The answer to this question may very well illuminate a crucial aspect of the debate that once raged among the angels.

The Source of all Blessings

⁹⁵ Save the two or three exceptions like Elijah.

Referring to Jesus, the apostle John writes, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). In another place, he recorded Jesus’ famous words, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

God is the source of all life. Not only is He is the Creator, but He is the Sustainer. As Paul declared to the Athenians, while referencing one of their poets, “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28; Colossians 1:17).

One of the great truths about God is that He is self-existent. He isn’t dependant on anything. This means that He has life in Himself. It’s part of His very essence. Older theologians often described this attribute as aseity. It is that property by which a being exists of and from itself.

Only God possesses aseity. This isn’t to say, however, that the point wasn’t disputed. Satan argued that life could be attained apart from God.

Picture a large circle and write in the center of that circle “God is life.” Satan believed that this picture of reality was inaccurate. He envisioned and argued that life could be found outside the circle, or he at least thought it was possible. He believed he could step out of its sphere and experience a new and different kind of life. But here is where history is terrifyingly instructive. It instructs us all about the life-stealing vacuum of sin.

Here a vital truth emerges, one that strikes at the very center of the great debate. Crucial to Satan’s entire position is the supposition that there is something good to be found by indulging in “that-which-God-cannot-do.” He thought he could find other circles outside God, circles filled with godless potential. The error here is that God is the *absolute* source of goodness. There’s nothing good outside the circle. In fact, antithesis only resides outside the circle.

Follow the argument.

If God is the fountain of all life, and if sin leads to separation from God, then sin will necessarily prove antithetical. It will yield the opposite of God. This is why Jesus can say, “Apart

from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Like a branch severed from a vine, it will inevitably wither up and die. This is exactly what Jesus says in John 15:6, “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” This same principle is taught in the eleventh chapter of Romans. When Gentiles who were dead in their transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1-3) were made alive in Christ, they were grafted into the “nourishing root of the olive tree” (Romans 11:17). Union with Christ results in life. But for those Jews who disbelieved, they were cut off and left on the ground to wither (Romans 11:20). Isn’t this what autonomy demands? Doesn’t it say, “I can live apart from You”?

If every last drop of life is found in God and flows out of God, it follows that nothing but death remains for those who detach themselves from the fountain. As Christ said to the woman at the well, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14; see also Revelation 22:1-2). If you drink from the cup of sin, on the other hand, your mouth will be filled with sand (Jeremiah 2:13).

Antithesis follows consistently and across the board. For example, God provides rest (Matthew 11:28; Hebrews 4:9); therefore sin leads to laborious toil and frustration (Gen 3:17-19). God provides peace (Phil 4:7); therefore sin yields anxiety and turmoil (1 Peter 2:11; Deut 28:20). In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3); therefore sin results in foolishness (Rom 1:22). God is light (John 8:12); therefore sin is darkness (Acts 26:18). God is truth; therefore sin is falsehood (John 8:44). God is love (1 John 4:8); therefore sin is unrighteous hatred (1 John 2:9). God is holy; therefore sin is unholy.

James tells us that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17). If the point about antithesis is true, then we can turn it on its head and say, “Every despicable and evil thing comes from below, arising from the father of lies who embodies sin.”

This perspective helps us better understand the hardening effects of judicial abandonment. In the first chapter of Romans, God is said to give truth suppressors over to their sin (1:24-26). One might say that God distances Himself. In so doing, the sinner is removed even further from the preserving effects of grace. As a result, the degenerating nature of sin increases and wickedness abounds more and more. This hardening follows as naturally as darkness in the absence of light. Darkness can no more strike a match or produce a ray of sunlight as can sin produce or impart life.

Choose Ye This Day

One cannot help but wonder if the angels who stood firm did not articulate this fact, urging the soon-to-be demons that nothing good would be obtained by abandoning their Creator. Might they have understood, by way of good and necessary consequence, this fundamental error? Might they have said, "There is a way that seems right to an angel, but in the end it leads to death?" (See Proverbs 14:12)

Whatever may or may not have been debated, human history is saturated with lessons of this truth. When this perspective is brought into focus, an interesting cord in the biblical narrative is brought to light, as the theme of life and death runs through the Scriptures from beginning to end.

In much the same way that Adam and Eve were faced with a life and death decision, the paradise of the Promised Land offered similar prospects for the Israelites. In fact, a good case can be made that the nation of Israel served as a kind of recapitulation of Adam, as the Promised Land was a picture of the Eden that would be spread throughout the world.

Addressing the choice facing the Israelites, Moses wrote,

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God,

by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.” (Deut 30:15-19).

The reality of this truth is expressed vividly and persistently throughout the prophets. One cannot read far into their writings without realizing that nothing but destruction and death awaits those who turn away from the Living God. The sheer repetition should impress this upon the church, and yet, time and time again, Christians forget and act shocked when rebellion is met with disaster.

King Uzziah learned this lesson first hand. The Chronicler tells us, “But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense” (2 Ch 26:16). When the priests intercepted him and pleaded with him to refrain, King Uzziah became angry and ignored their entreaties. After the confrontation, we’re told that leprosy broke out on his forehead, a symbol not only of uncleanness, but a shocking reminder of sin’s destructive and withering ends. The Chronicler then writes, “And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD” (2 Ch 26:21).

Consider as well Jesus’ earthly ministry. If ever there was a time when the principles of life and death were juxtaposed, it was when Jesus walked the earth. Men and women, those who were blind or diseased or plagued with physical ailments, were continually brought to Him. Not infrequently, these problems were the result of demonic oppression. Some were made mute (Matthew 9:32-33); some blind (Matthew 12:22); others suffered terrible

seizures (Matthew 17:15-18); while yet others were driven to insanity and compulsive behavior, even to the point of cutting themselves (Luke 8:27-29). Physical deformities also resulted from the presence of evil spirits. Luke recounts a woman who was bent over and unable to straighten her back for eighteen years. When Jesus healed her, He attributed the affliction to Satan (Luke 13:10-17).

In each instance, Satan's presence twisted the person. This is not a coincidence, nor do these examples merely reflect a few cranky moments in an otherwise benign spectrum of results. Satan is Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies. Like flies drawn to a rotting carcass, Satan and his demons swarm around death and carry disease to all those they touch.

In stark contrast, Jesus entered history as the light of the world, and as life itself. With love and compassion, He reversed the works of Satan, showing His power over darkness. The blind received sight. The lame were made to walk. The leper was made clean. Even those who would dare touch his garments in faith were healed (Mark 5:30). There was nothing the demons could do but tremble and obey His commands. The darkness was powerless in the face of the light. It had to flee.

This must have been a time of great clarity for the angels, watching their Lord dispel Satan's crippling effects. Of course, they had been learning this lesson for a very long time already. There was, nevertheless, a powerful manifestation of this truth in the life of Christ. A clarity shone with unparalleled glory when He conquered death by rising from the grave, having borne the curse in his body on the cross. Paul says that it was Christ "who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10; Hebrews 2:14-15). It is no accident that in the New Heavens and the New Earth there is a river of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, where on each side stands the tree of life, yielding its fruit each month, providing healing for the nations (Rev 22:1-2). In contrast, death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, where those whose names are not recorded in the book of life are consigned. This is, as John writes, the second death (Rev 21:14).

The Reality of Mortality

Physicist and atheist, Alan Lightman, was the first of four MIT professors to address the question of the meaning of life at a 2011 Veritas Forum event. Standing in a lecture hall before a throng of students and faculty, he shuffled a few papers, thanked the audience for their attendance, and then said the following,

“I’m 62 years old. Over the last decade, I’ve had more and more evidence of my mortality. I’ve lost hearing in the high frequencies. I forget names of people. I forget words I want to use in my writing. I used to be a runner, and I’ve had to stop running a couple years ago because my knees were getting bad. No matter how hard I concentrate on improving my hearing or my memory or my knees, my mental thoughts cannot reverse the changes in my body. And I am reminded that all of us, and I, are material beings. Our consciousness and our self awareness create an illusion that we are made out of some special substance; that we have some kind of ego-power; some “I-ness;” some unique existence. But in fact, we are nothing but bones, tissues, gelatinous membranes, neurons, electrical impulses and chemicals. We are material. We are stuff... We are a bunch of atoms, like trees and like donuts. And when we die, those atoms will be scattered back into soil, air and water. True, for a brief period of time my atoms have a special arrangement, particularly in my brain, that leads to consciousness, thought and self awareness. But that special arrangement will soon be scattered and rearranged, and this physical thing that is me will be gone. And in my case, I hope in another thirty years, if I’m lucky. Coming to terms with our materiality is the most difficult challenge that we have in our existence.”⁹⁶

⁹⁶ *Life, the Universe, and MIT*, by Professor Alan Lightman, which can be found online at: <http://www.veritas.org/Talks.aspx#!/v/1044>

If his materialistic worldview is bracketed out of the discussion, it's safe to say that Dr. Lightman, when he talked about coming to terms with materiality, was thinking of man's mortality. That is the perennial question in his mind. What is man to do with the knowledge that he is going to die?

A healthy man may avoid the clutches of disease, if he possesses an especially stout constitution; but what a man cannot escape is the gradual choke of death. Something tragic happens over the course of human maturation. We are born as babes and toddle our way to adulthood, the apex of human vitality. Here we live for a brief moment, but then sadly, and almost imperceptibly at first, the gradual decline towards deterioration clicks into gear. Life begins to wither away. As men take note of their condition, they cannot help but think about the meaning and purpose of life. They may fill their schedules and occupy their minds to the fullest, never pausing long enough to consider their mortality. Yet when an open casket is set before them, the reality of death pushes all else aside and focuses their mind in a way that no scholarly volume or talk show could ever duplicate.

The First Gray Hair

Imagine Adam looking into a still pond and marveling at his reflection, noticing for the first time a wrinkle or a sudden sprouting of gray hair? What did he think? What did he say when those marks continued to multiply? Adam and Eve certainly knew the strange developments were connected with death, but could they have really anticipated what was in store for them? Could they have really envisioned where it was all heading?

Nearly every Saturday I deliver the mail to a place called the McKinney House, a home established for the elderly requiring assistance. Entering the facility, one is greeted by an open living area, a space furnished with sofas, chairs, a TV, and a piano. As I sort out the mail, sliding letters into a nearby wall unit, I cannot help but glance over my shoulder and consider the men and women

situated in the open room. Some are hunched over in their wheelchairs, bent in silence. One is in a reclined position, hands raised slightly, shaking uncontrollably. Some wander slowly about with blank stares. Others sit quietly in their seats, content to look at nothing in particular. In an adjacent room, several women are playing a game of Scrabble. They're obviously struggling to spell simple words like "cat" or "bat."

One may talk about aging well, or say that someone is "aging gracefully," and while there's truth in those words, the slow and persistent advance of decay is no good thing. In fact, it is an enemy (1 Cor 15:26). It's an assassin that creeps within our bodies, lurking in the shadows of our health, tearing us down bit by bit. Like the guinea worm mentioned earlier, death feeds on us and in due time pushes it way out in a boil of symptoms. Muscles atrophy. Joints begin to ache. Vision blurs. Arteries clog. Hair falls out. And that's only the beginning. As the body deteriorates, severe weakness sets in. Vitality is lost. The once vibrant and capable man of youth is made feeble. The mind is likewise affected. Dementia leads to confusion. Memories are lost. Soon the most basic tasks of life become impossible. Others must feed you and wash you and care for you.

In all of this, every man and woman is being shown in a profoundly personal way the failure of sin. Through it we learn, or we ought to learn, that sin debases a man, even humiliates him. When a person cannot even keep himself clean, all of his youthful pride is dispelled, sucked away by the life-stealing nature of sin.

Truly sin affects the whole man. Nothing is left unscathed. Our bodies teach us this. Is there any part of the human body, after all, that can escape the process of decay? Everything from the bottom of a man's foot to the very top of his head changes for the worse. Women may paint their faces or cover their bodies with fine apparel, but it is done so in vain, ultimately. It's a cover up job, an attempt to merely hide the inevitable. In this it is seen that sin is uncontrollable. It cannot be placed on a leash. A pill cannot be swallowed to curb it. Neither can it be bargained with.

The Path of Life and the Path of Death

A corpse really does say it all.

When a man's health finally fails and his spirit departs, the person is torn apart. This isn't to say that his torso is cleaved in half. Here that more fundamental separation is in view, the final picture of sin's bitter effect. Man's wholeness is utterly shattered.

In the wake of death, the shell that is left behind continues to rot in a sickening and revolting way. Soon the smell becomes unbearable and the body must be disposed, hid from human sight, an apt physical result expressing deep spiritual truths.

Oh, how we recoil at death. Having been made in the image of God, we instinctively recognize its horror. We naturally gasp and take a step back. This recognition runs so deep in our veins that men actually become physically ill when they witness death first hand. Everything within us shudders and quakes, as if our soul is crouching in the corner of our body, unable to cope with the magnitude of the situation. Man wasn't made to deal with this, after all. Death is unnatural.

Oh, how deeply we grieve the loss of a loved one's departure. When Adam and Eve were forced to leave the Garden, that scene became a picture of separation from God, and by extension, life itself. We now experience the pain of separation through quarrels and estrangements, but even more so when someone dies. We learn that sin separates; it alienates; destroys relationships. And through it all, through all the tears and fear, through all the havoc of physical evil- the aches and pain and caskets- Satan's lie is vividly portrayed, set before the watching world so that everyone can see its folly.

Satan said that we would not die. He was woefully wrong.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Nineteenth century theologian, W.G.T. Shedd, aptly described sin as "the suicidal action of the human will." *Sermons to the Natural Man* (New York: Charles Scribner and CO), 203.

Chapter 6

-The Irony and Absurdity of Sin-

It's a striking comparison.

In the fourth chapter of 1 Kings, it says that Solomon was king over all Israel and that “Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy” (vs. 20). It was a time of great prosperity. Food was plentiful. Nations esteemed the throne. “Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon” (vs. 25). Happiness abounded in those days, for the Lord, as He had promised, had blessed them.

Fast forward ahead to the days of Jeremiah the prophet, to that time when the Babylonians were ravaging the land, slamming a rod on the backs of God's people. Judah's armies fell. The people were murdered and displaced, and perhaps most startling of all, the Temple was trampled under the boots of foreigners.

And why? What caused the scene to shift from one where there was eating and drinking with glad hearts to one where there was deep sorrow and intense pain? The answer of course is sin. The people forgot the Lord their God and turned away from Him, indulging in the false religions of their pagan neighbors, as well as the sinful lifestyles that marked such cultures. Whether voiced openly or quietly affirmed in their hearts, Israel believed they would experience greater joy by following their own godless desires.

With this in mind, compare the scene in 1 Kings with a section in Isaiah. As a messenger of judgment, the prophet declared,

“The LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet, therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the signet rings and nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils. Instead of perfume there will be rottenness; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty.” (Isa 3:16-24)

If anything is evident in the above pronouncement, it is that the happiness and peace experienced under the reign of Solomon has long disappeared. But what is particularly interesting, and more than a little striking, is how the Lord’s judgment impacted the women. There is a reversal of fortunes, an ironic twist where their pride, which was expressed outwardly through their dress and priorities, and even their posture, obtained the exact opposite of their intended aim. These were Cosmo girls, women concerned only with the latest fashion. They idolized their faces and worshipped their bodies. By pursuing such ends with all their heart, mind and strength, they showed what they most desired, what they believed would bring them the most pleasure. The irony is that by idolizing the self, all the glories they most prized and hoped to achieve were turned upside down. They received the exact opposite. Instead of possessing beautiful free flowing hair, they were made bald. Instead of smelling like a perfumed flower, the stench of rottenness clung to them. Rather than radiating silky youthful skin, their faces were covered with hideous scabs.

This is a picture of sin’s dreadful irony.

At the core of Satan’s awful idea is a belief that sin is more enjoyable than holiness. Spreading out into the hearts and minds

of sinful man, it is now a concept shared and cherished amongst humanity. Ungodliness is deemed a pleasure. It is, therefore, the aim of this chapter to explore the irony and absurdity of sin; to scrutinize the satanic promise of pleasure to see if what it claims yields its assured results. In so doing, particular attention will be paid to the structure of life and how sin continually fails to achieve the end of what it desires, namely, happiness. Sin's irony will also be prominently featured, as it is God's design to not only exhibit sin's failure, but expose it for what it truly is, a fraudulent copy and leech of real pleasure.

Satanic "Joy"

Happiness is a basic thirst of the soul.

The perennial question, however, is where such happiness is to be found. There was a time before the fall of man, and before the great angelic rebellion, when everyone agreed on the answer. It's embedded in the following imperative, "Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His will, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure" (Psalm 103:20-21, NKJV). Joy was found in God, by both enjoying Him and His works (vs. 22), as well as by obeying His will. In so doing, the angels shared in their Master's joy (Matthew 25:21).

The challenge to this way of life came, of course, when Lucifer argued that new joys and pleasures could be found outside of God's will. Through the power of sin, he proposed that doors of unexplored potential were just waiting to be opened. Following in his footsteps, men have bought into this promise and have turned away from God, intent on finding greater happiness by doing things their own way. The quest for joy now has a radically new orientation. God is deemed irrelevant at best.

Fallen man is ever prone to pursue "the good life" apart from God, due to his bondage to sin. He's spiritually dead, a vessel of godless desires. The first petal of Dort's Tulip is more than

capable of explaining this fact. But while such theological explanations are certainly true, and should be confessed with ardent conviction, a simpler point is being sought here. The matter might be stated like this:

Men choose to live apart from God because they believe that sin is more enjoyable than holiness.

Whether the haughty women of Zion, or carousing drunkards, or money hungry tycoons, or sports idolizing enthusiasts, each pursues their particular vice with great devotion, seeking happiness through their particular sin of choice.⁹⁸

Here the Scriptures remind us, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal 6:7-8). When it comes to the matter of pleasure, God is allowing the script of sin to play out on the stage of history in order to unveil its true nature. As was shown in the previous chapter, sin doesn’t result in life, but death. This is in its own way quite ironic. But here the scope is being broadened to the very concept of happiness itself. In so doing, the following question is being asked: Is sin better than holiness? Does it lead to greater joy and pleasure?

As men run about the globe sinning in every conceivable way, mixing sins like an artist blending his paint, God uses the canvas of human experience to expose the failure of Satan’s claim. He does this in an ironical fashion though. It is one thing to show that sin doesn’t lead to greater happiness, but it is another thing entirely to demonstrate that sin actually secures the opposite effect,

⁹⁸ Now it is true that men may regret certain sinful actions, having not been given completely over to the hardening effects of sin, or they may even find certain horrendous acts objectionable, like that of pedophilia, thereby showing the law of God written on their hearts, but the basic point remains. When the Lordship of Christ is rejected and men refuse to bow the knee, they are affirming that the good life is not rooted in God. They look for joy elsewhere.

that it invariably leads to sorrow, pain and grief. This heightens the glory of God, for, as Jonathan Edwards writes,

“The wisdom of God greatly and remarkably appears in so exceedingly baffling and confounding all the subtlety of the old serpent. Power never appears so conspicuous as when opposed and conquering opposition. The same may be said of wisdom; it never appears so brightly, and with such advantage, as when opposed by the subtlety of some very crafty enemy; and in baffling and confounding that subtlety.”⁹⁹

In order to illustrate the point, eight “everyday” sinful behaviors will be briefly considered. By examining these sins with an eye towards exposing their irony, the fabric of life will be made more explicit, especially how God has injected into the moral structure a powerful apologetic against the kingdom of darkness.

The matter of money is first up.

A Checklist of Failure

Money

Oscar Wilde is reported to have quipped, “When I was young I thought that money was the most important thing in life; now that I am old I know that it is.”

If ever there has been an object of worship in the West, it has surely been the almighty dollar. Men crave it, strategize ways to accumulate it, horde it, flaunt it, and die for it. They may not literally present offerings to it, but they will sacrifice their own families, if need be, casting all aside in order to add another zero to their bank account. Money is, for such people, simply a very thin green idol. This is why Jesus can say, “No one can serve two

⁹⁹ *The Wisdom of God displayed in the way of Salvation*, found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 151.

masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Mat 6:24).

The irony is that when men crave money and devote themselves to it, thinking that it will bring them true satisfaction, they soon find that it multiplies their grief. Paul writes,

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1Ti 6:9-10)

Instead of procuring life and peace and happiness, Paul notes that those who lust after wealth suffer ruin and destruction and pierce themselves with many pains. This doesn’t exactly sound like a good time. But as is the case with all sin, the person’s heart is blinded and their minds are clouded. Instead of recognizing the folly of the harmful desire, they run headlong, thinking that if they could somehow just earn a little more, if they could buy the next item on their wish-list, they would truly be happy. But like a thirsty man lost at sea, they foolishly drink the salt water. By so doing, their thirst is multiplied, and they are never quenched. Solomon long ago observed this when he wrote, “Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income” (Ecc 5:10 NIV). This is certainly ironic.

There is another ironical aspect to greed. Jim Elliot, missionary to the Waodoni people in Ecuador, famously said, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.” Men in their lust for gold forget that hearses don’t pull U-hauls. Along such lines, Jesus told a parable of a certain rich man with godless aspirations. He said,

"The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to

store my crops?" And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21; see also Ecc 6:1-2).

Men foolishly set their eyes on the present, as if there isn't an incalculable eternity awaiting them. How is it that the greatest CEOs miss this? They store up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves steal, but fail to see where the greatest possible returns can be secured (Matthew 6:19-20). Moses understood this. Refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he forsook his high position in order to be numbered with the people of God. As the author of Hebrews records, "He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward" (Heb 11:26). Or to say it a bit differently, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul" (Matthew 16:25a)?

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that godliness is an outright enemy of gain in this life. As the rich young ruler walked away from Christ, unwilling to commit everything to the Lord, Peter spoke of their forsaking everything to follow Jesus. In response, Jesus explained, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). While this shouldn't be understood in a crass health and wealth manner, as if Jesus intends for us to claim BMWs or yachts, it does mean that the people of God enjoy covenantal blessings. By joining the household of God they gain

innumerable brothers and sisters who truly love them, and in the ago to come, eternal life.

Anorexia and Gluttony

Although there are a number of contributing factors (including control and achievement), a crucial component of the disorder known as anorexia is a nearly all consuming preoccupation with self. The individual desires to be thin and beautiful and will forgo eating normal quantities of food, even impoverished levels, in order to achieve a perceived ideal. The horrible irony is that as the person continues to reduce their caloric intake, intent on getting rid of that “unsightly fat,” their beauty fades. Their face becomes gaunt. Their bones protrude. Hair starts growing on their face. The attractiveness they once possessed is forfeited for an unhealthy and truly pitiable body.

On the flip side, gluttony deifies the comfort of food. Instead of trusting in God, the person seeks satisfaction in what can be eaten. They try to fill their soul with calories. Their god ends up being their belly. Ironically, instead of consuming food for enjoyment, the food ends up consuming them. It becomes a burden; a dehumanizing affliction where the person’s physique becomes horribly misshapen. They struggle to walk. Their joints groan. In extreme cases, they can’t even summon the strength to rise from their own bed. Others must feed them. This is surely a picture of the absurdity and irony of sin.

Worry/Anxiety

To my own detriment, this has been a sin I have come to know very well. It too is horribly ironic.

For those who suffer panic attacks or experience what has been termed generalized anxiety disorder, there is, like the anorexic, an extreme focus on the self. Everything turns inward as the worrier

becomes absorbed and obsessed with certain troubling thoughts. In my own case, and it isn't uncommon, I fretted over sickness, specifically, throwing up. The terrible irony is that everyday thought patterns soon become infected with other controlling patterns of thought, which inevitably affect one's behavior. You begin to worry excessively over germs. You worry about food quality. If left unchecked, these things continue to grow and intensify. For some, the inward focus propels them towards agoraphobia (fear of the marketplace or simply leaving one's own home).¹⁰⁰ Panic sets in. The heart begins to race. Breathing becomes restricted. Tingling sensations shoot up the arm or on one's head. After this happens, the person almost inevitably becomes a hypochondriac, in some respect. But what is particularly striking is how the obsessive worrying leads to actual sickness. When it is left unchecked and the fretting and agitation continue to mount, the troubled individual eventually becomes physically ill. They vomit.

Behind all this is the problem of control. The man or woman struggling with anxiety doesn't want to lose control. Instead of trusting God and casting one's self on the Lord, the person tries to control the situation through worrying. But again, the irony of this sin is that the very thing the person most wants to avoid, the very control they didn't want to lose, is devastated by panic attacks. Worrying steals peace and injects chaos into the person's soul, the problem they so desperately wanted to avoid.

Bitterness

Bitterness is likewise ironic. In the case of those who have been wronged (or think they've been wronged) and nurse a grudge for weeks or months or even years, the anger reserved for the

¹⁰⁰ Or sometimes claustrophobia, though not in the sense of fearing a small space, per se, but fearing being unable to escape a particular space, like a crowded auditorium or plane. The thought, "What if I get bad?" bombards the mind. "What if I pass out and make a fool of myself?" And so go the thoughts, over and over again, creating fear in the heart, which easily slips towards panic.

offender has a way of consuming the embittered person. They want to punish those who wronged them. Yet as they continue to hold on to their anger, refusing to forgive, all the while entertaining vengeful thoughts in their minds, they live a tortured existence. The one they love to hate holds them in bondage, strangely enough, driving them ultimately towards depression, and even Satan himself (Eph 4:26-27).

The Conceited and Self-Absorbed

There are those who so utterly dominate discussions, speaking so fast and with such fervent self-interest, that those listening cannot even begin to get a word in. Or if they do, they're quickly interrupted with the words, "Oh, yes, I've had that happen. I was..." which is just another way of saying, "Enough about you, back to me." Or if somehow the conversation isn't immediately redirected back around to them, they suddenly look distracted or disinterested.

Now what is it these people most desire? Attention? Well, yes. But it goes deeper than that. In the case of women, they usually want approval because of hidden insecurities. They have something to prove. Ironically, the insecurity that unsettles their soul and results in blazing verbiage, usually in the form of bragging about their children, causes others to avoid them. Their friends grow weary.

For others, however, they simply want to brag. They love to elevate themselves and voice their achievements. This too leads to alienation, the very thing that steals a bragger's thunder and pleasure. But even in the case of those with true talent, like a famous athlete or gifted actor, if all they seek is the applause of men, then that is all the reward they will receive- the fleeting and fickle approval of men. The One who truly counts, namely, God, is not impressed and does not applaud (Matthew 6:1-6).

Slothfulness

The man who refuses to work, desiring to live the life of ease and comfort, stretching out on his couch, content with daytime TV and all other manner of trivial occupation, may be too lazy to open a Bible and learn about the folly of such sluggardly behavior. By cherishing idleness and excessive relaxation, he does not realize, as the Proverbs warn, that poverty and need will assault him like a thief or an armed guard, thereby stealing his comfort (Prov 6:6-11). Ironically, “the hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (Prov 12:24). His cravings won’t be met (Prov 13:5), his way will be full of thorns (Prov 15:19), and his stomach will soon be empty and hunger will overcome him (Prov 20:4). Even his own house will rebuke him, says the Teacher, “Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks” (Ecc 10:18).

The Chains of Sin

Sin, it is thought, brings freedom. No one stands over you, confining you, telling you what you can and can’t do. You are your own boss, the master. Few doctrines are more cardinal to the kingdom of darkness than this. The tragic irony is that sin does not equal freedom, but slavery. Stating the matter with brilliant clarity, Jesus said on one occasion, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34).

Men believe with all their hearts that holiness is going to cause them to miss out on something good. In their minds, they’re going to be restricted, shackled by the killjoy of righteousness. What they fail to perceive is the destructive and addictive nature of sin. Is the young man glued to the internet, playing World of Warcraft for hours on end free? What about the person who finds himself searching after more and more porn? Or what about the alcoholic? Or the power hungry politician? The junkie? Or the fame consumed celebrity? This is not freedom, but slavery. And it

is destructive to the core. As Paul writes to the Romans, “For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death” (Rom 6:19b-21).

I well remember speaking with a man who was considering becoming a Christian. Along the way he asked me, “So what will I do?” Not understanding what he meant exactly, I asked him to clarify. “What will I do for fun?” came his reply. Probing further, it soon became apparent that he didn’t want to give up two things: Playboy magazines and bars. He eventually ended up walking away from Christ, having counted the cost and found himself unwilling to repent.

It must be asked: Who is the one really shackled here?

Yes, *But...*

A number of other sins are equally ironic. One could talk about how the lips of the adulteress woman drips honey, “but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword” (Prov 5:3-4). One might recall how sin promises life, but actually leads to death (Rom 5:17). One could note how unbelievers, though claiming to be wise, become fools (Rom 1:22). And one could also observe how the haughty, who esteem themselves and seek to magnify their name, are brought low (1 Peter 5:5-6).

While all this is true, someone will no doubt object, saying, “Yes, but are you really going to say that sin isn’t enjoyable? Or that it isn’t fun? I mean, come on. People don’t sin because it’s unpleasant.”

It’s a fair question. On the one hand, there are sins that don’t appear to gush with *intrinsic* pleasure. Take the man who lies in order to avoid blame. He’s certainly trying to avoid pain and

humiliation, no doubt, but it isn't as if people sit around in the solitude of their bedrooms speaking untruth in order to get high. The man who likewise erupts in anger at his ailing lawnmower isn't feeling especially happy. Swearing might provide a small measure of enjoyment, a release of frustration, but such outbursts are mixed at best. On the other hand, consider stealing. Not only does the thief feel a rush while committing the sin, but he obtains an item of value. The same might be said of the college student landing a one night stand. As the party draws to a close, he leaves with a blonde by his side. While this behavior is sinful, he surely enjoys the excitement and pleasure of sex. We might even say that he's happier for it, which is to say that he wouldn't have experienced as much pleasure that night had the girl snubbed him.

With these latter examples in mind, it could be asked if there is there something to Satan's claim. Has the kingdom of darkness tapped into new sources of pleasure, a way of life operating contrary to God's law and nature that secures foreign joys?

Delighting in Darkness

The biblical answer is surprisingly clear. The wicked do in fact delight in sin. A sampling of passages bears this out.

"Folly is a joy to him who lacks sense..." (Prov 15:21)

"It is as sport to a fool to do mischief..." (Prov 10:23 KJV)

"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?" (Prov 1:22)

"Men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil" (Prov 2:12b-14).

“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thess 2:9-12)

“Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” (Rev 22:15)

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” (John 3:19)

“An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so...” (Jer 5:30-31)

“Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.” (Rom 1:32)

According to these verses, men delight in darkness, find joy in it, experience pleasure in it, love it, and approve of it. Those are strong terms, and they should cause one to pause. The challenge is how to understand such delights in view of the warring kingdoms. If the dominion of darkness does in fact promise joy, and if it does deliver, doesn't this allow for boasting? Could not sinners say, “Frankly, I find sin thrilling and enjoyable. Why give it up for inferior pleasures?” Could not Satan say, “I told you so?”

The Source of all Pleasure

David declared, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

It ought to be stated from the outset, and stated strongly, that God is the source and author of all pleasure. One should confidently say with the Psalmist, “No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11; see also 1 Tim 6:17). Every last drop of goodness and joy originates with God, therefore He can dispense every last drop of goodness and joy to His people. The proof is everywhere. Literally.

In the second chapter of Genesis, an interesting little statement emerges. After placing man in the garden, it says of the trees, “And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen. 2:9). God made the trees enjoyable to look at. When a person stands on the edge of a rocky cliff, looking out over a vast rolling forest, their soul sings for joy. The sight brings delight. Or when a person stands next to a gnarly and knotted, vine covered tree, they cannot help but marvel. And why? Because God fashioned it to excite their senses and fill them with wonder. The same is true with the fruit growing on trees. God made us capable of tasting the goodness. That’s amazing!

Let’s ponder this.

I love well crafted video games. Since the age of four, I’ve been popping quarters into arcade machines eager to save humanity from invading aliens. With the advent of the PC and its ever growing capabilities, video games have come a long way. The 8-bit experiences of long ago have been replaced with stunningly realistic, complex environments. Virtual worlds are created.

While the point is an obvious one, it bears reminding that in these newer games, none of the onscreen visuals occurred by chance. The programmers, along with artists, created everything. Nothing *just happened*. Every single color was chosen. Every cloud in the sky was placed there. Every interactive sound was imbedded. Everything! If boats float it is because the designer’s programmed them to do so. It is not as if they simply said, “Let’s make boats

float.” They determined the exact mechanics and physics. They determined buoyancy, how the water would look like, how it would move and reflect.

The same is true, but on an infinitely greater scale, with God and the universe. He not only created the strawberry, choosing its particular color and texture and shape, but He orchestrated all the complexities of its taste. He made the flavor. But it goes deeper than that. He made man in such a way that when the strawberry hits his tongue, and when its juices flow out, their taste buds connect with the fruit in such a way that it actually brings delight. None of this is accidental. It’s like the video game. It was purposively designed. This means that God, in so making the strawberry, wanted people’s faces to light up with pleasure, when the fruit is eaten; He designed the good feeling to exist between the two.

The implications are absolutely staggering. When the innumerable joys and delights of creation are brought into focus, it must be remembered that God made them all. He made them for us.

Consider how a mother rejoices in holding an infant; how the child actually feels against her skin; the softness; the tender weight. Consider the joy she feels while looking down at the baby’s tiny, porcelain face. Does she love such little fingers by chance? Or consider how the sun reflects off a bubbling stream. Not one of the ten million gleaming reflections is happenchance. They all dance together for our delight, just as God designed them to do. When we reach out and pet a kitten, our fingers love the feeling of the soft hair, because God made it so. When a husband and wife exchange a passionate kiss, their very being shouts for joy. God made that as well. When the artist dips his brush into a vial of red paint, it ought to be remembered that God thought up that very color.

So whether the playful puppy, or the crisp morning air, or the singing birds, or the note C#, or the ocean waves, or the still forest, or the satisfying rhythm of poetry, or the myriads of flavors chefs explore for years on end, they all bring us pleasure because God made them to bring us pleasure.

Is it any wonder then that the Psalmist can say, “Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! For He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things” (Psalm 107:8-9).

In light of this truth, it should be stressed that sin doesn’t create new joys, but rather twists and perverts existing ones. It is a leech that feeds off original goodness and borrows capital for its own ends, as there is nothing excellent in all of creation that doesn’t flow from God’s throne.

Take the womanizer who loves to add notches to his headboard. Is sexual intercourse his own creation? Not at all! Physical intimacy was created by God for man, but made to be enjoyed within marital bounds. The unbeliever sees this as a restriction, something to be cast off, and indulges in sex according to his own designs. He may feel many of the same physical pleasures a married man feels, but this is only because of common grace. If he were to lean entirely on the power of sin, he would feel no more pleasure than a blackhole.

C.S. Lewis captured this well in *The Screwtape Letters*. As the two demons continue to correspond by letter, one writes,

“Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy’s ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same; it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 44.

It might still be thought that the man who enjoys multiple women gains something others do not. He taps into forbidden pleasures, as it were, experiences a similar but peculiar quality found only, or primarily, through sin. One might think of drugs in this respect. Do they not produce immediate and heightened pleasures? Sugar is tasty, but can it compete with cocaine?

A caution is in order here. If one tries to reduce sin to pure drudgery, as if it doesn't produce a measure of immediate gratification, they will have a hard time squaring the idea with the Scriptures themselves. For when speaking of Moses, the author of Hebrews writes, "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward" (Heb 11:24-26).

In this passage there are in fact "fleeting pleasures" to sin. They are temporary, because, as has already been noted, they borrow from the capital of God's goodness. The real treasure, as this same passage goes on to say, is found in Christ; there is something much greater to be gained by suffering for Christ in this present age. So yes, the treasures of Egypt would have felt very good. Who wouldn't enjoy watching pyramids be built while being fanned and fed grapes? Nevertheless, even in this life, sin isn't without its bite. The natural man seeks after pleasure and even tastes it for a time, but it soon withers as God withdraws His grace, leaving the person more dissatisfied. This is a tragic irony. The darkened heart cannot help but delight in evil, which inevitably results in greater pain. It is like a man who loves, and is irresistibly attracted to the taste of some poisonous brew. The initial gulps bring delight and satisfaction, but the sensation soon turns sour, as the poison inflicts its damage.

The Matrix of Joy

But let not too much be granted to the initial pleasures of sin. It would be a mistake to suppose that ungodly behavior satisfies the deep thirsts of the soul. If those desires aren't met, the person is inevitably left feeling dry and empty and, ultimately, unfulfilled.

An illustration will help here. Suppose a young man's heart is dazzled by the sight of a young lady. She is innocent and beautiful and of good Christian character. Intent on winning her heart, the young man sends her flowers and writes her lovely letters. He is gentle with her and shows he knows what it means to care for another. As the relationship progresses, the young man approaches her father and asks for her hand. Having come to know the uprightness of his daughter's suitor, he happily gives his blessing. In time, after all the wedding plans and after all the anticipation, the big day arrives. The bride is beautifully dressed, radiant and glowing. She is given away by her father. Families are united. Vows are made. Dancing and celebration follows. And afterwards, the newlyweds leave for their honeymoon. There they become one flesh, and the man receives his reward.

Now imagine another man in a very different context. This individual withdraws fifty dollars from his bank account and heads towards the red light district. Upon finding a woman that catches his eye, he works out a deal and they check into a hotel room for an hour. The two become one flesh, and the man likewise receives his reward.¹⁰²

There is a difference, isn't there? The one is a pleasure flowing from holiness and results in greater blessing. The other, while pleasurable, is degrading and misses out on all the attendant blessings, which, when added together, leads to greater happiness and deeper satisfaction. The contrast is stark and consistent. One will either say with the Psalmist, "Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!" (Psalm 112:1b), or one will experience the sting of death, "For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by

¹⁰² I am indebted to C.S. Lewis for this illustration.

the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore the fruit of death” (Rom 7:5).

Another “Yes, But...”

Suppose an apologist from the school of the abyss were to read this chapter. What might he say at this point? I imagine that he would shake his head, grin devilishly and remark as follows, “Yes, this is all good, isn’t it? The case for holiness seems so clear, no? I suppose it is... except that God has rigged the whole system. What do I mean? Well, hasn’t He cursed sin? Doesn’t he impose Himself on our pleasures by calling down judgment? Just consider Sodom and Gomorrah. They were having a grand old time, drinking and playing and using their bodies as they wished. They loved their coarse joking too. But then God reigned down fire on their city, interrupting their party. So yes, sin is going to “result” in disappointment and sorrow. It’s all tilted in His favor. Haven’t you noticed how He’s plagued sexual freedom by creating STDs? We would get along just fine if He would quit tearing down our delights with his judgments.”

It is, of course, sheer convenience to forget the actual track record of sin. Whole continents have been plunged into the ravages of war because of sin. Untold families have been torn apart. Friendships have been destroyed. Inner turmoils like depression and anxiety and paranoia have driven men and women to slit their wrists. Murderous plots have been carried out. Men have enslaved their neighbors. And if one were to walk the streets of Sodom on a Friday night, they would probably be raped. History is one long recording of sin’s failure. To argue that sin, if left alone, would bring greater happiness is pure fantasy. History is exhibit A.

That being said, it is certainly true that God does in fact actively judge sin. The people of Israel in the days of Jeremiah would certainly agree. God caused people to feel uncomfortable during the days of Noah. That’s the point. Diseases like Syphilis and AIDS are potent physical reminders of sin’s destructive nature.

One More Retort

“Ah, but you see,” continues the demon, “You need to think more deeply about this matter. The whole thing is still rigged. For in the end, it is God who will not put up with sin. Why is that? Because it doesn’t agree with His nature? Because it runs contrary to His will? Because He made us? Why curse something that does in fact make us happy? The man who wants to play golf on Sunday morning is deemed a sinner. The woman who likes to show a little cleavage and likes being a tad naughty with men is called a harlot. Why be so pushy about all this? Isn’t that what it all comes down to? God has to have it His way? But before you answer, think further. Imagine a sophisticated holodeck, a pod-like container where men and women can experience continually every imaginable pleasure at maximum strength. They choose the delight and their minds are made to see it and feel it. Sheer ecstasy fills them, complete and utter ecstasy! There are no problems with overindulgence in this fantasy world. Power supplies aren’t a problem. They don’t need to stop and go to work. Nothing. God sustains and engineers it all. Now if that would make men happy, why wouldn’t God do it? Why not simply give mankind what they want?”

While this might appear to be an extreme proposition, it actually illuminates a crucial aspect of reality. The man playing golf, or the man plugged into the holodeck, are both, in essence, operating out of the same satanic impulse of old. Autonomous man wants to do things his way. He wants to be his own god, determining what is best or good or acceptable according to the dictates of his own self-generated standards. God needs to get out of the way. Or He should at least accommodate our desires. Chill out.

But in each instance, man is trying to wrest the scepter out of God’s hand. He is attempting to dethrone God and elevate his own desires above those of his Maker. In all this, God’s glory is not

perceived as ultimate. Man's glory is. In this respect, it all goes back to that original idea voiced so very long ago. It flows right out of the heart of that fallen angel who wondered if there was another route to happiness, a way of life that usurps the Lordship of Christ by subtly assuming the rights of deity.

Joy is ultimately found in the kingdom of light. In fact, while describing the kingdom of God, Paul cites joy as one of its chief attributes. He writes, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17).

Holiness equals happiness, and it comes through the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

The Irony of Holiness

This raises an interesting point. Thus far it has been argued that sin doesn't lead to greater happiness, but rather secures the opposite of its intended end. Irony aptly describes this phenomenon. It has also been insisted that joy is rooted in Christ alone. One might be so bold as to suggest a kind of 6th sola here—*Sola Gaudium*.¹⁰³ If a person wants to experience true and lasting joy, they should look to Christ.

Interestingly, there's a sharp irony to this as well. As Christians walk in the Spirit, yearning after holiness, they are promised wonderful blessings. From the world's perspective, the means used to obtain these blessings appear absurd. Who would dare think, for example, that it will be the meek who inherit the earth (Matt 5:5)? Surely a great general or presidential figure will triumph. But it is not so. In the end, the humble of heart will possess and reign on the earth. The same is true with prayer.

¹⁰³ Five solas emerged out of the Reformation: *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone), *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Solus Christus* (Salvation through Christ Alone), *Soli Deo Gloria* (The Glory of God Alone). In light of the great struggle between light and darkness, it would surely be right to highlight the fact that joy is found in Christ alone.

Dropping down to one's knees appears to admit defeat or display weakness, but in actuality, tremendous power is unleashed through it (James 5:16), not to mention courage (Acts 4:31).

Consider as well the matter of wisdom. Paul writes, "If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (1Co 3:18). The proverbs agree, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom" (Pro 11:2). When a person throws away their autonomous reasoning, they gain true wisdom and knowledge.

There is also the matter of Christ's yoke. Many look at the commands of Christ and turn away, feeling they are too restrictive or oppressive. But listen again to Christ's words, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30; see also 1 John 5:3). Contrary to the world's suppositions, Christ's yoke provides rest and is an easy burden to bear. Many likewise view obedience to Christ as confining, even enslaving. The truth, however, is that through the Son a soul finds true freedom. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36; 2 Cor 3:17).

One could also talk about how in losing everything they gain everything (Phil 3:8-11); or how a saint's abasements and afflictions are preparing for him an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor 4:16-18); or how the first shall be last and the last first (Luke 13:30); or if a person will lean not on their own understanding, their paths will be made straight (Prov 3:5-6); or how those who demagnify themselves will be exalted (James 4:10); or how through weakness comes strength (2 Cor 12:10); or how persecution brings great reward (Matt 5:10-12).

The list could go on.

God ultimately provides every sweet joy to those who trust him. He loves to do it. As Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11; 17:3).

Chapter 7

-The Epistemology of Idolatry-

A number of decades ago, a conference was held in Europe in order to discuss the nature of worldviews. The objective was to achieve a measure of consensus on what constituted a worldview. As the meeting progressed, the complexities of the issue became manifest, and in the end, the project was deemed a failure. The reason it failed, as expressed by W.T. Jones, was because, “The differences of opinion about worldview reflect differences in our own worldviews.”¹⁰⁴

As long as fallen man has been thinking and expressing his thoughts, filling scholarly journals with ideas and playing with metaphysics long into the night, there has been no serious advance towards consensus. Truth is as elusive as ever. Aristotle disagreed with Plato. Hume awoke Kant from his dogmatic slumber. Modernity gave way to postmodernity. Round and round it goes, a swirling vortex of conflicting viewpoints. If anything is evident, it is that philosophy, with all its many centuries of contemplation, has failed. The world is a million shades of opinion.

This is no accident. The city of man has erected its library on the foundation of autonomy. Because of this, each human carries under his arm a book entitled, “I Am the Truth.”

Satanic “Omniscience”

¹⁰⁴ Quoted by Dr. Scott Oliphant in his lecture, “The Role of Worldviews in Apologetic Dialogue,” which can be found online at: <http://www.apologetics315.com/2010/06/westminsters-apologetics-course-on.html>

Lucifer knew that God's knowledge exceeded that of his own. But when he considered the prospects of sin and how it might unlock new vistas of knowledge, areas of wisdom that God had not, nor could not explore, given His character (Jer 32:35), Lucifer believed it could introduce new categories to the game, questions that God would not be able to answer.

The prospects appeared doubly promising when Lucifer considered how autonomy would allow him to redefine the very notion of fact itself. Facts would no longer be exclusively defined by God. In fact, entire worldviews could be constructed. Lucifer would explore sin, crack open its secrets, and become a new creator, one able to mold and redefine reality. Autonomy would insure it.

Friedrich Nietzsche understood this well when he wrote,

“The noble type of man regards *himself* as a determiner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgment: ‘What is injurious to me is injurious in itself.’ He knows that it is he himself only who confers honour on things; he is a *creator of values*. He honours whatever he recognizes in himself: such morality is self-glorification.”¹⁰⁵

The idea peddled by “the noble angel” was packaged in the form of a crafty promise, “You too can be as God.” By partaking of this unholy sacrament, others could become unlawfully divine. The move was, in a very real sense, a revolution of polytheistic proportion, a grandiose plan that allowed everyone to share the joys of deity. The universe in all its diversity would no longer be unified under one divine head, but under a multiplicity of authorities. As a result, there would be billions of gods inhabiting the universe.

¹⁰⁵ *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1907), 228.

The Proliferation of Would be Gods

Satan's awful idea infects men at the level of their thinking. Instead of acknowledging God as the source of all truth, a radical reorientation has occurred. Man displaces their Creator. They kick Him out of their thoughts and absolutize their judgments. They look at what God has made and say that it is other than it really is. As a result, entire worldviews are formed. This is true of Buddhism, naturalism, animism, and the millions of other idiosyncratic views held by those shopping at grocery stores, walking down sidewalks and attending movie theaters. In this it should be observed that self-deification isn't found only in the palaces of ancient Persia, but in the suburbs of the Midwest.¹⁰⁶

The implications are profound and far-reaching. Since men function as final arbiters and creators of truth, they continually judge others according to their own standards. They weigh information on the scales of self-determination and only accept that which first passes the bar of autonomous reasoning.

In this, mankind is essentially following in the footsteps of Adam. When God told Adam that he would die if he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam had to make a decision. Would he believe God or would he question His authority? Through the cunning of the Serpent, the seat of divine authority was subtly undermined. Adam was tempted to step outside the boundaries of God's sovereign rule and evaluate the matter from another angle, to judge the situation as a wholly independent mind. At root, Adam was being tempted to join hands

¹⁰⁶ The seemingly pious attempts of false religions to worship some kind of god are no less guilty of this crime. Calvin is helpful here when he writes, "Mingled vanity and pride appear in this, that when miserable men do seek after God, instead of ascending higher than themselves, as they ought to do, they measure him by their own carnal stupidity, and, neglecting solid inquiry, fly off to indulge their curiosity in vain speculation. Hence, they do not conceive of him in the character in which he is manifested, but imagine him to be whatever their own rashness has devised." (Ibid., 46)

with the Serpent and journey out into the realm of autonomy where God's Word isn't savored as the absolute bedrock of knowledge, that most sure and certain foundation by which all else is judged. Instead, he was encouraged to adopt a perspective where the truth is considered an open question, one where God's Word is judged by a standard located outside of God's Word. By reaching out and tasting, Adam became the measuring stick.

Sympathizing with the Devil?

Framing the matter in such black and white categories may very well cause some to wonder if the issue doesn't require greater nuance. "How could it be any other way?" someone may want to ask. "A person shouldn't blindly assume the absolute truthfulness of God's Word, right? A person surely needs at least some form of independent evidence."

It is a fair question and deserves to be fleshed out further. Expanding the concern further, someone may want to say, "Just think of it. Along comes the serpent, a creature Adam had never met, and it calls into question God's authority. Adam probably had a good idea who was telling the truth, but when confronted with a different viewpoint, he couldn't have known with certainty who was telling the truth. He had to act as judge over both. How could he give the serpent a fair shake, if he simply dismissed the notion out of hand, refusing to even consider it? That would be irresponsible, no? Aren't we forced to admit that it would have been *a little* irresponsible, even if the Serpent's position was in fact wrong?"

A Shift in Ultimates

The concern voiced above strikes at the heart of the issue, as it is precisely here where the shift in ultimate heart commitments is brought into sharp relief. When it is assumed that God's Word is not absolute, which is to say that it doesn't exercise ultimate

jurisdiction over one's thoughts (even at the level of adjudication), a subtle shift occurs. The questioner, whether intentionally or not, sets God to the side and absolutizes his own judgment. In so doing, God's standard is superseded by that of another.

Dr. Cornelius Van Til made this point when he wrote,

“When man fell it was therefore his attempt to do without God in every respect. Man sought his ideals of truth, goodness and beauty somewhere beyond God, either directly within himself or in the universe about him. God had interpreted the universe for him, or we may say man had interpreted the universe under the direction of God, but now he sought to interpret the universe without reference to God.”¹⁰⁷

Strangely enough, few think to question their own presuppositions, especially whether they're begging the question by assuming the absolute competency of their autonomous intellect. But of course that is the crux of the issue. Wannabe gods aren't eager to relinquish their perceived rights.

It is precisely here, therefore, where the kingdoms clash, so far as the battlefield of the mind is concerned. The central question being fought over is this:

Is God the absolute bedrock of all knowledge?

As children of the devil, men naturally deny this claim. In their eyes, the one incontrovertible and undeniable fact of reality is the perceived right and power to understand and define the universe as they deem fit. Van Til helpfully summarizes the outlook,

¹⁰⁷ *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1998), 95.

“Here are the marks of the natural man in his attitude toward the interpretation of the facts (events) of the world:

(1) He thinks of himself as the ultimate judge of what can or cannot be. He will not allow any authority to stand above him revealing to him what may or may not have happened in the past or what may or may not happen in the future.

(2) This assertion or assumption of autonomy on the part of man makes a covert, if not an overt, assertion about the nature of God. God (it is assumed if not asserted) *cannot* be of such a nature as to control any and all phenomena.

(3) These two assertions or assumptions imply a third: that man’s thought is, in the final analysis, absolutely original. Whatever his ultimate environment may be, the area of interpretation that man makes for himself will be true for him because his thought is in effect legislative with respect to that environment.”¹⁰⁸

This goes a long way in describing the world’s present condition. Natural man makes key assumptions about himself and the world around him. These key assumptions run directly counter to the Lordship of Christ. As a result, by abandoning their Creator, the world loses its epistemological footing. But since men are made in the image of God, and are therefore inescapably interested in truth, they seek to make sense of reality. Since knowledge needs to be anchored in something, mankind attempts to fill the void with complex theories. In this respect, the history of philosophy is very much a story about humanity trying to find an alternative epistemological foundation. Man is continually looking for something solid on which to hang his hat. But the task proves elusive and frustrating. Their man-made explanations continually unravel at the seams. In one sense, this is due to the inherent inadequacy of their theories. In another, but intimately related sense, the futility stems from God’s actively thwarting such vain endeavors.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 310.

God Responds

One could rightly say, therefore, that the Lord delights in overturning the so called wisdom of man. While corresponding with the Corinthians, Paul highlights the point,

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor 1:18-25).

After having called the philosophers and scribes to attention, a simple question is asked: Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? It is a striking question. Given the rhetorical way Paul asks the question, it is as if he’s saying, “Yes, God has made foolish the wisdom of the world!”

But how so?

The Epistemological Irony of Idolatry

Through irony, of course.

In his letter to the Romans, while building a case against sinful humanity, Paul describes the natural man's tendency to suppress the truth. "For although they knew God," he writes, "they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Here the mind is said to be actively affected by sin. To quote it again, they "became futile in their thinking." The Greek word translated as "futile" is *mataioo*. It means to render one foolish, as well as morally wicked, or, more specifically, idolatrous; to become vain.¹⁰⁹ When the Lord gives sinners over to their sin, they are driven deeper into the darkness, and by extension, further away from the truth. Filled with pride and idolatrous zeal, these hardened sinners begin to boast. They claim that their way of life and their way of thinking is best. But the shocking irony, notes Paul, is that "while claiming to be wise, they became fools" (vs. 22).

In the battle over true wisdom, God loves to expose the world's wisdom as empty and foolish. He says, "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish" (Isa 44:24b-25). Like all the many other supposed strengths of sin, the subject of wisdom and knowledge prove no different. Sin results in a reversal of fortunes. When men line their walls with degrees from Ivy League schools, and add impressive letters next to their names, thereby obtaining titles like doctor or professor, but refuse to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ in their thinking, they are made foolish, the very thing all their schooling was supposed to cure.

This isn't to say that one of these highly educated individuals wouldn't score higher on a test, than say, an illiterate or uneducated Christian. Clearly an atheistic lawyer or doctor knows more in that sense. Rather, the foolishness described here is more

¹⁰⁹ *Strong's Greek Dictionary*, G3154.

fundamental in nature; it is a kind that strikes at the very bedrock of truth and knowledge. It centers on the subject of epistemology.¹¹⁰

When God is rejected as the source and ground of truth, an epistemological cord is severed. Men are plunged into the peculiar position of thinking they know certain truths (as they are obvious to them), but when pressed as to how they certainly know such truths, ignorance must be confessed. Agnosticism rushes in.

The significance of this stems from a theme already developed in this volume. As has been argued, sin entails antithesis. Since God is the source of life, sin inevitably yields death. Since God is the fountainhead of joy, sin produces misery. Knowledge is no different.

In the case of those angels who wondered what hidden treasures of knowledge might be unearthed by looking outside of God, they should have known that nothing but an intellectual vacuum would be found. Think again of the circle. If every last drop of truth is located within the sphere labeled “all truth,” it follows that “no-truth” will be found outside the circle. Practically speaking, this means that when men try to ground knowledge in anything else besides God, agnosticism inevitably follows. It matters not how intelligent they are. Nor does it matter how much time is devoted to the subject. The endeavor is fatally flawed from the start. Through this God underscores the bankruptcy of unbelief.

The “What If” Problem

The point being stressed here is that agnosticism always follows on the heels of unbelief. Not gnosis (knowledge), but agnosis (no knowledge). In order to get at this concept more fully, it might prove helpful to consider one of the more thorny problems facing philosophers. One might call it the “What if” problem.¹¹¹ It

¹¹⁰ The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, in particular its foundations, scope, and validity.

¹¹¹ For a helpful introduction and overview of the issues involved in epistemology, Lee Hardy’s five part lecture series entitled “Modern Philosophy”

begins by asking questions about the existence of the external world. The argument seeks to demonstrate the utter futility of trying to know anything with certainty apart from Christ. This particular line of reasoning might begin by asking you to imagine a brain in a vat.

There the organ sits in a clear container, tubes and wires running in and out of it, a translucent blue liquid bubbling quietly. It is a human brain.

The brain isn't dead, but is rather alive, functioning perfectly well. Diodes send specific electrical pulses to different parts of the organ, causing it to imagine a world where the owner of the brain thinks he exists. The world feels in every way like a real world. But it isn't a real world. It's an imaginary world, one fabricated by a powerful computer controlling the brain. Inside this imaginary world, the owner of the brain, a person by the name of Brian, thinks he is living out his life, like any other human, working and playing, going about his business without the slightest inclination that things aren't at all as it seems.

Now here is the million dollar question. How do you know that you aren't a brain in a vat being stimulated to see and experience a world that doesn't reflect true reality? If you were going to prove that this isn't so, how would you go about doing it? Would you appeal to something in the environment? But that's part of the illusion. Would you appeal to your thoughts? But again, you're being made to think in a particular way. How would you get behind it all in order to pull back the curtain and see things as they *really* are?

The short answer is that you can't. You're a brain in a vat, bound and unable to break free.

Hollywood has made its fair share of movies playing off this philosophical conundrum. The most popular of which has surely been *The Matrix*. As might be recalled, Keanu Reeves, playing the main character, Neo, finds out that the world in which he lives isn't at all real, at least not as he conceives of reality. A highly

sophisticated computer is actually feeding off human bodies held in pod-like capsules. The computer creates an imaginary world, a matrix, where these humans live and move and play. Their minds are made to think they're living out their existence in a normal physical environment. But it's all an illusion. Their conscious life is a grand parlor trick.

This problem may seem like nothing more than a silly mind game, a suggestion meant only to be dismissed out of hand. But it strikes a serious note. Is it possible that we are living in something like a Matrix? If so, and how could we be certain that we aren't, then what is true reality like? How could we get at it?

Consider another angle. Rene Descartes, the man who famously wrote, "I think, therefore I am," wrestled with similar enigmas. Adopting a skeptical frame of mind, he asked whether it was possible if we were living out an extremely realistic and vivid dream. Many of us have experienced vivid and convincing dreams. What if our present life is just that? How would we know whether or not this is the case? And if it is the case, then what would that say about our present knowledge? Would it be illusion? Yes. Would we be in a position to talk about what is really true and false? No.

Take a more potent and truly diabolical example. What if God isn't actually good, but is rather an evil demon tricking us into thinking he is in fact good, only to intensify the horror later, when he unveils his true character? Is that possible? Is such a horror an absolute impossibility? Surely one must concede that it's not *utterly* impossible.

Now how many different scenarios like the ones listed above could be true? From the standpoint of sheer possibility, one would have to admit that any number of them are possible. One might even say that there could be unimaginable scenarios, scenarios our minds are incapable of grasping. Maybe we are like ants and algebra. No matter what they do, ants cannot comprehend algebra. In the same way, perhaps true reality is ultimately inscrutable to us. Either way, we don't know.

Here is the trouble facing finite man. Since he cannot be certain that one of the above scenarios doesn't reflect the way things really are, then he can't be certain he truly understands reality. In fact, he couldn't even determine the relative likelihood of one of the above scenarios. Calculating the probability requires possessing adequate background information, the very thing in question. In this respect, the "What if" problem leaves man scratching his head, unable to quantify the possibility of anything. Everything appears to be equally probable and improbable.¹¹²

As a result, we simply do not know, and absolute knowledge crashes on the rocks of possibility. Chance becomes ultimate, and it eats at everything.¹¹³

True Reality... Out There

¹¹² Another angle could include the notion of information. The more information a person possesses, they more certain they feel they have a firm grasp on the truth of a particular matter. In the case of ultimate reality, however, it could be asked how much we certainly know about it. Here one might be inclined to point to the growing body of scientific knowledge. But how do we know that there isn't an important piece of information that, when discovered and properly understood, wouldn't radically alter our understanding of reality? It is not only possible, but very likely, given our history. With this borne in mind, it would seem that all judgments about reality must be suspended, or held with some doubt, until all of the data is taken into account. But here finite man is once again confronted with the dire problem of omniscience. Can man know everything perfectly? If not, then wouldn't agnosticism remain? If so, then how much? How is the degree adduced?

¹¹³ Here someone might say, "This is still nothing more than a mind game, a fun idea meant for sci-fi thrillers, but not real life. So forget the rabid skepticism. I'm just going to believe what is obvious to me, what is clearly common sense." If we are living in God's world, then yes, there will be a common sense understanding of reality that coheres with the true nature of things. But if not, the decision to ignore the pull of skepticism proves arbitrary. Regardless, some think the common sense view of reality is Platonism, others existentialism, others naturalistic materialism, or Hinduism, and so on. "Common sense" equally falls prey to the "What if" problem.

The chasm, therefore, existing between ourselves (the subject) and the world lying outside ourselves (the object), has been a sharp thorn in the side of philosophy. The relentless agnosticism outlined above fuels the problem, as no one is able to really get at true reality. We are in one way or another locked up within ourselves. The recognition of this fact has left an indelible impression on the history of philosophy.¹¹⁴

Here one can think of Plato's world of the forms or ideas. He believed there was something more real beyond our present world, a realm inaccessible to us in our present state. Immanuel Kant tried to weave his way through this riddle as well, but in the end demarcated reality into the phenomenal realm (the way we see the world) and the noumenal realm (the way things really are), thereby causing a rift in knowledge. Both, in their own ways, recognized the gulf that exists between our perception of reality and true reality. The problem, of course, is that if there is a reality out there, one lying beyond our grasp, then our present knowledge cannot be anchored in anything solid. Agnosticism rises to ascendancy and certainty proves illusory.

No one probably understood this more clearly than the Scottish philosopher, David Hume. Through a careful inquiry into the nature of human understanding, Hume masterfully deconstructed the empirical approach to knowledge. With razor sharp logic, he challenged the very notion of causality, especially the process known as induction. He noted that we form beliefs based

¹¹⁴ "Any epistemology," writes Dr. Frame, "must do justice to subject, object, and criterion. When, like the majority of famous philosophers, people try to do epistemology without God, they must find an absolute somewhere else than in God. For such people it is tempting to try to make absolute, that is, to deify, one of the three elements of human knowledge- the subject (subjectivism), the object (empiricism), or the law (rationalism)- and to call the other two elements into question. In such epistemological systems there is no God to guarantee that the three elements will cohere, and so the philosopher must be prepared to make choices among those elements when there are, as in his assumption there will be, irresolvable conflicts." *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), 110.

on perceived causal connections. If something happens over and over again, we draw inferences based on the assurance that the same thing will happen again. But, as he argues, there is no rational reason why this must be so. This observation leads to utter skepticism. Human sense perception isn't, in the final analysis, trustworthy.

The emotional impact of this position weighed heavily on him. If he was right, and he could see no way out, then merciless agnosticism was inescapably man's lot. In a candid moment, while reflecting on the apparent disparity between his rational conclusions and his inability to live consistently with those beliefs, he wrote,

“Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favor shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? And on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty.

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.

Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determined to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life. But notwithstanding that my natural propensity, and the course of my animal spirits and passions reduce me

to this indolent belief in the general maxims of the world, I still feel such remains of my former disposition, that I am ready to throw all my books and papers into the fire, and resolve never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy.”¹¹⁵

The Enlightenment has failed, and in its wake the dominant mood of secular society has become that of subjectivism. Everything is relative. The individual perspective reigns supreme, and the “discipline of epistemology,” says Andrew Fellows, “is dead. No longer is any truth to be found. Objectivity is impossible.”¹¹⁶ This explains why our culture is so quick to talk about truth in entirely personal terms. “It’s true for me,” says one, “but not necessarily true for another. They have their own truth.”

The grand irony is that after two thousand some odd years of tedious reflection, unbelief still cannot answer the most basic questions of life.

“What if” vs. God

The obvious concern at this point is how God provides a way out of this slippery pit. If the “What if” problem extends to the very corners of our sense perception, how are Christians in a better situation? Couldn’t the ardent agnostic ask, “Is it possible, dear sir, that God is a horrible demon misleading us?”

It should be admitted that if there isn’t answer, the emotional turmoil of the “What if” problem would prove crippling. Doubt and frustration would inevitably infect the soul, as peace and assurance are sacrificed on the altar of chance.

¹¹⁵ *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1896), 269.

¹¹⁶ Lecture series at L’Abri Library, *Epistemology*, found online at: <http://www.labri-ideas-library.org/>. Mr. Fellows, it should be noted, is a Christian. This quote represents what the current state of studies in epistemology has concluded, so far as the secular world in the 20th century is concerned.

Thankfully, however, the beast of uncertainty can be slayed.

Before a solution is unpacked, particular care should be given to the placement of one's feet. Part of the problem with a discussion like this is the tendency to lose sight of the Christian's epistemological foundation. The old Christian hymn, *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less* might prove helpful. The last line of each stanza proclaims, "On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand." Note that the refrain doesn't say, "On Christ, the highly probable 'I took a leap in the dark by faith' rock, I stand; all other ground is, perhaps, though I can't be really sure, sinking sand." On the contrary, it proclaims certainty.

A crucial element to this discussion is to keep one's eye on their epistemological footing, to not lose sight of what the Christian worldview advances as true. In a phrase, one must be careful not to accidentally slip away from the Lordship of Christ towards autonomy. Consistency must be maintained throughout, both feet planted on the Rock. The significance of this will be fleshed out further momentarily.

To begin, Paul tells the Colossians that in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). Every last granule of wisdom and knowledge, urges Paul, is found in Christ; for, as has already been stressed, Jesus is the very embodiment of "the Truth" (John 14:6). God is, by very nature, truth. When asked where the laws of logic are rooted, the answer is God's nature. The same is true with knowledge. The Proverbs says as much in its opening verses, "The fear of the LORD is the *beginning* of knowledge" (Prov 1:7).

Since God is the Creator of everything, all facts have been endowed with meaning by Him. Every relationship. Every atom. Every galaxy. Everything has been defined by God. As a result, there are no brute, or uninterrupted, facts. Everything has a specific meaning in the mind of God. It follows, therefore, that only as we think God's thoughts after Him do we rightly understand reality.

Moreover, since God is omniscient, He perfectly and exhaustively knows and understands all facts. It is not as if someone could hand a book to God and provide Him with new bits of

information. He knows everything. And since He's sovereign, there aren't any rogue molecules just waiting to create an unforeseeable state of affairs in the future. It is all perfectly under His control. And since He is immutable, a person needs not fear that He will change His mind about the truth or grow dull in His memory. And lastly, His omniscience and immutability and sovereignty and truthfulness will never fade away. God is eternal. There has never been a time when the truth hasn't existed, or a time when it will cease.

Due to our having been made in His image, created to live in this world and interact with it, He has fashioned us in such a way so as to insure the reliability of our senses. The world is made specifically for man. Therefore, science is a viable and God-ordained discipline, as is language, philosophy, art, and the many other wonders of life that enrich the human experience (Gen 1:28).¹¹⁷ God's competency and goodness assures it.

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Having said all this, the agnostic will roll his eyes and say, "That's all fine and dandy, but how do you know that this is true? You still haven't dealt with the "What if" problem. How do you know that you aren't a brain in a vat made to think about a made-up God? Or, similarly, how do you know that God isn't tricking you?"

Here one must observe the presuppositions at play. In the case of the agnostic, he honors a different ultimate besides God. For him the Lord of the universe is possibility itself. By calling everything into question, chance is esteemed as ultimate. God must bow, as it were, before possibility. The sticking point, however, is that God is absolute, not chance. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe who "works all things out in accordance with the counsel

¹¹⁷ This isn't to say that there aren't challenging truths in the world, concepts that boggle the mind. As opposed to agnosticism, however, such truths can be discerned through careful study. Reality isn't ultimately unknowable. Even in the case of deep mystery, God knows the solution.

of His will” (Eph 1:11). Even the results of a dice roll belong to Him (Prov 16:33). So when the agnostic insists that the Christian must adopt the “What if” framework, with all of its assumptions and *principia*, he tacitly assumes the ultimacy of his position. He presupposes from the outset that chance trumps God.

“But how else can it be?” the agnostic will retort. “You simply cannot assert that God is absolute, as if the mere assertion solves the problem. It totally begs the question!”

Here is where the Christian needs to look at his feet. How shall he respond to the complaint? Will he step off the foundation of God’s Word in order to engage the problem? Will he partially step off, leaving one foot on the rock with the other dangling over the edge, somehow hoping to meet the opponent halfway? Or will he answer with both feet firmly planted on the rock?

Many are tempted to step off the rock. But the problem is that if Christianity is true, then all other ground is necessarily sinking sand. Therefore, if the Christian loses sight of where he is standing, he will inadvertently lose his footing and abandon the unique and absolute Lordship of Christ. In so doing, possibility comes crashing in. He will, in effect, trade one absolute for another- and absolutizing chance leaves him with absolutely nothing!

There is another problem as well. The agnostic knows that he does not know, yet he passionately maintains that he can’t accept the absolute Lordship of Christ, because of its supposed transgression of some indisputable law. This is sheer duplicity. How does he know this is an indisputable law?

Here it must be clearly understood that the agnostic’s commitment to possibility is no less audacious or question begging than an unwavering commitment to the Lordship to Christ. The profound difference is that Christ actually provides a sound basis for rationality. Indeed, the most rational thing in the world is look to Christ, the solid Rock. On the other hand, making dogmatic claims from a foundation of quicksand is downright foolish. Jesus taught as much when He said,

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matt 7:24-27).

The agnostic appears at first blush to be objective, the one exercising intellectual responsibility. But it must be stressed that if the Christian is begging the question, so is the postmodernist. His unspoken epistemological commitments, flowing out of autonomy, define reality for him. He assumes from the start, and as an indisputable fact, that God cannot be God, as defined by the Scriptures. God’s authority is deemed anathema.¹¹⁸

Could it be mere coincidence that this happens to reflect the central thesis of Satan’s position?¹¹⁹

The Circularity of Absolutes

¹¹⁸ To further help the agnostic recognize the duplicity of his dogmatic denials, a simple train of thought can be explored. Ask the following: “What if Christianity is true? Wouldn’t that mean that we are presently reasoning in God’s world? If so, then wouldn’t we expect reality to reflect the ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics of the Christian worldview? Very much so! Therefore, if these key points are dismissed out of hand, assumed that they cannot be so, then the agnostic denies *from the outset* even the possibility of Christian truth. If Christianity is true, then its worldview is reality. It would profoundly affect the very notion of fact and proof itself.”

¹¹⁹ Along these lines, when Satan considered God’s nature and “that-which-God-cannot-do,” he elevated possibility to idolatrous heights. *Might* there be new pleasures to be found? *Might* there be new sources of knowledge and wisdom?

The agnostic and the Christian (or Christianity and any other worldview for that matter), will, therefore, necessarily conflict at the level of absolutes. If Christ isn't Lord then something else will serve as a substitute authority. Interestingly, this results in a kind of circularity where each person cannot help but appeal to their fundamental commitments in order to establish or justify their fundamental commitments. Theologians and philosophers have long recognized this fact. Dr. Bahnsen explains,

“All argumentation about ultimate issues eventually *comes to rest* at the level of the disputant's presuppositions. If a man has come to the conclusion, and is committed to the truth of a certain view, P, when he is challenged as to P, he will offer supporting argumentation for it, Q and R. But of course, as his opponent will be quick to point out, this simply shifts the argument to Q and R. Why accept them? The proponent of P is now called upon to offer S, T, U, and V as arguments for Q and R. And on and on the process goes... Eventually all argumentation terminates in some logically primitive starting point, a view or premise held as unquestionable.”¹²⁰

The logically primitive starting point, or absolute, functions as the all controlling grid by which all else is judged. It controls one's epistemological outlook, one's manner of argumentation, one's philosophy of fact and use of evidence. As a result, ultimate circularity inescapably follows.

Think of the rationalist in this respect. The rationalist can only prove the primacy of reason by using rational arguments. Likewise, the empiricist can only prove the primacy of sense-experience by some kind of appeal to sense-experience. Logic functions in much the same way. Try to establish the laws of logic without being logical. It is impossible. All systems of thought, if they attempt to explain ultimate issues, will necessarily prove

¹²⁰ *Always Ready* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1996), 72.

circular. They cannot help but appeal to their foundational principles.¹²¹

When the unavoidable circularity of absolutes is acknowledged, one might be tempted to throw up their hands in despair, fearing that the entire enterprise of rational discourse dissolves into nothing more than the barking of dogmatic assertions. How can anyone adjudicate, after all, between competing claims, if their method of adjudication necessarily reflects the principles of their worldview?

Rather than serving as a foil to truth, the very fact of absolute circularity reflects and magnifies that which lies at the very heart of reality; it reflects and magnifies the Bible's unswerving commitment to, and explication of, the unique Lordship of Christ.

Think of it this way. If we are in fact living in God's world, and if the God of Abraham is the one and true living God, then it follows that reality will inescapably reflect this truth, for God is absolute truth. Nothing less would be expected. Therefore, when we're confronted with this puzzling aspect of reality, the God-ness of God shines all the more brightly.

Consider but one passage in the book of Hebrews, by way of illustration. While warning and urging his Jewish audience to remain faithful to Christ, the writer appeals to Abraham in order to underscore the certainty of God's promises and the need to persevere. In what might be viewed as a surprising statement, the author describes the establishment of the covenant in the following terms:

"For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you.' And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the

¹²¹ See chapter five in Dr. Frame's work *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* for a helpful discussion.

promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” (Heb 6:13-18).

Often a covenant is established or authenticated by appealing to a higher authority. This adds credibility and insures that the stipulations will be enforced. In the case of God, however, it states that there was nothing greater to which He could appeal than Himself! He is the ultimate authority, the very bedrock of security and truth grounding the covenant. This, it should be stressed, provided the guarantee. With remarkable clarity, the unparalleled authority of God is taught in an unflinching way, and it accords perfectly with the nature of absolutes.¹²²

Absolutes and Idolatry

Let us return now to the idea of false absolutes. What is evidenced in the case of unbelieving thought is a curious example of epistemological idolatry. Up until now we have been describing the unbeliever’s ultimate heart commitments in more philosophical terms (absolutes, starting points, ground of knowledge). But there is another term, a more biblically oriented term that better describes the unbeliever’s absolute. It is idolatry.

Martin Luther, in his discussion of the first commandment, defined idolatry, in part, as that which “your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your God.” And again, “That now, I say, upon

¹²² Think of the Paul’s imperative in 2 Cor 10:5 to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. Such all-encompassing statements accord with God’s sovereignty and aseity. While unbelievers may scoff at this biblical command, or other similar passages and concepts, the believer knows that anything less would indicate penultimacy. Such evidence illustrates the internal consistency of God’s Word, as men are ever prone to “Pelagianize” reality.

which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your God.”¹²³ G. K. Beale builds on this by adding “whatever your heart clings to or relies on *for ultimate security*” is your God.¹²⁴ This is very right. By rejecting the all-sufficiency of Christ, it is as if the unbeliever crafts in his mind an idol and bows down before it, esteeming it more highly than God. He does not, as the greatest commandment teaches, love the Lord his God with all his mind (Matt 22:37). He esteems something else, believing that it will provide ultimate security. This is the essence of epistemological idolatry. Therefore, when Satan called God’s authority into question, he became as much a blacksmith of idols as any ancient Babylonian.

This explains why idols of the intellect always prove futile. They cannot bear the infinite weight of God’s office and inevitably crumble under the pressure. They are false gods.

Picture a small wooden idol carved in the shape of a man, arms extended upward, palms open. Situated above it, hovering ominously, hangs a tremendous block of chiseled granite. In a moment, the massive stone will be dropped on the idol. The small figurine will have to catch it. This is what happens when the rightful rule of God is rejected and replaced with something else thought to provide greater intellectual security. A metaphysical idol is fashioned, and as a result, the new absolute is made to carry the weight of ultimacy. But it cannot bear the burden, as it is not the infinite personal, triune God of the universe. Just like the wooden idol standing under the colossal block, it is crushed and smashed, as it attempts to sit on the throne. As a result, the false ultimate inevitably rubs against the grain of reality, thereby yielding errors and self-contradiction, which in turn leads to frustration and ruin. Error “sticks out,” and the square peg must be crammed through the round hole of reality. Such is the history of philosophy.

¹²³ *The Larger Catechism*, translated by F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau, published in *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church*.

¹²⁴ *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 17.

Ignorance and foolishness are continually manufactured on the anvil of idolatry.¹²⁵

Dumb, Deaf and Blind

This should not come as a surprise. Since idols are dumb, deaf and blind, those who trust in them become like them. Consider the words of the Psalmist:

“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.” (Psalm 115:4-8; see also 135:15-18)

Throughout the OT, men regularly fashioned idols as a way of depicting their gods. They would craft them, bow down to them,

¹²⁵ Properly speaking, the unbeliever lives in a frustrating dialectic of rationalism and irrationalism. On the one hand, he knows that he knows some things. Nothing could be more obvious to him. And it is true. He does truly know, because he is made in God’s image, and he is living in God’s world. And yet, his philosophical framework or worldview cannot make sense of such knowledge. In fact, it works against it. Think again of the quote from Hume. His rational mind told him that he couldn’t know anything for certain. Unable to live with that conclusion, he found comfort in the plain and simple pleasures of life. Atheistic scientists often display a similar tendency. Someone like Dawkins continues to cling to science because, as he likes to stress, it produces tangible results. It works. But of course it does. Dawkins lives in God’s world. The problem is that his materialistic worldview undermines the scientific objectivity and stability of his cherished discipline. But instead of abandoning materialistic naturalism, he continues to cling to it, believing that it is the only viable option. It is “Science in the gaps.” This trust is every bit as religious as the faith of a monk. Human autonomy and materialism operate as functional idols.

pray to them, and present offerings to them. In a word, they worshipped them.

The prophets, serving as spokesmen of the LORD, regularly chided such behavior, pointing out the utter folly of idol worship. Judgment extended well beyond mockery, however. The Lord made the idol worshippers reflect the vanity and emptiness of their false gods. Therefore, since the idols couldn't see, the people's eyes were blinded to truth. Since the idols couldn't hear, the idolaters became dull of hearing, unable to understand and heed the Lord's instructions. In effect, their minds were darkened.

While the theme of reflecting what one worships is scattered throughout the Scriptures, Isaiah is particularly forceful. In chapter 42:17-20, the link between those who trust in idols and their becoming deaf and blind is crystallized. He writes,

"They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, "You are our gods." Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but my servant [Israel], or deaf as my messenger [Israel] whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear."

And again in an extended passage in Isaiah, where the Lord gives people over to the emptiness of their idols, it reads,

"All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses [the idols] neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame... The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees

of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (44:9, 12-19. Underlined text added for emphasis.)

In his excellent work, *We Become What We Worship*, Dr. Beale sums up the matter nicely,

What God's people had revered in Isaiah's time, they had come to be like, and this likeness was spiritually destructive to them. This is an ironic punishment, since the people thought that their worship of the idols would lead to enhanced life and prosperity, but in reality it resulted in further deterioration of their spiritual life and ultimately their material prosperity... Their punishment was ironically patterned after their sin: You like idols? If so, then you are going to become like your idols, and this likeness will devastate you."¹²⁶

The sophisticated man of the 21st century may think he is above the foolishness of idol worship, having never bowed the knee to a crudely fashioned idol. Yet he is every bit as guilty as the

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

unlearned tribesman who regularly prostrates himself before a carved image, and shares not one ounce less in its blinding and deleterious effects. A suit and tie make little difference when it comes to idolatry (1 Cor 2:14).¹²⁷

The Foolishness of the Cross

So far as it has functioned as a system of truth, aiming to unlock new vistas of knowledge and wisdom, Satan's awful idea has failed spectacularly, save in one very important respect. In seeking to rip the scepter out of God's hand and occupy the throne, calling God's wisdom and authority into question, the truth of God has been made to shine all the more brightly. His truth has been considered from many diverse angles, some of which would have been hard, if not impossible, to see outside a context of conflict. Men and angels have scrutinized the matter more fully, digging deeper into the subject, meditating upon it at length. Sometimes a single beam of light stretching across the floor of a very dark room draws the eye more intensely and illuminates more by way of contrast than had the room been lit completely and made free from all trace of shadow.

If Satan's idea is to be understood as a discovery of truth, then it has achieved very great ends indeed, though not as he intended. The glory and wisdom of God has been elevated more highly, confounding the subtleties of the Serpent in an ironical and

¹²⁷ The words used in Scripture to describe idols prove highly instructive as well. G. K. Beale writes, "One word for idols is the noun *gillulim*, which comes from a Hebrew root meaning 'roll.' The noun form can mean either 'pellets of dung' or 'shapeless, loggy things.' Either way, 'loggy' or 'dungy,' the word expressed the utmost contempt, and conveyed a double entendre, since the one would inevitably suggest the other." He goes on to discuss 2 Kings 17:15 and how the idols there are *hebel* (vanity, emptiness). "The point" he writes, is that our lives become vain and empty when we commit ourselves to vain idols of this world..." Lastly, he mentions *mipleset*, or "thing of horror" or "thing of shuddering." He says, "To worship such idols will bring only horror and dismay, not the peaceful bliss that is hoped for." Ibid., 307-308.

humiliating fashion, turning the edge of his so-called wisdom against him.

But as glorious as this overturning of the world's wisdom is, the irony has been thickened by means of the cross. In the passage cited earlier from 1 Corinthians, where Paul asks, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" he immediately amplifies the thought by writing, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1:21). The word "for" connects verse 21 with verse 20, thereby establishing a flow of thought. As a result, it is as if he is saying that part of the means of making foolish the wisdom of the world is accomplished through "the folly of what we preach." In other words, there's something about the apostolic message that strikes at the heart of the world's wisdom.

This deserves a moment's reflection. In verse 21, Paul teaches that the world did not know God through its wisdom. This ignorance wasn't accidental, as if it just happened to turn out that way. He says, "For since, *in the wisdom of God*, the world did not know God through wisdom." Man's inability to unlock the meaning of the universe through autonomous means occurs by God's design. The physical realm, with all its many laws and peculiar qualities, along with man's sinful mind, will not yield ultimate truth. It is true that the heavens pour forth speech day after day, speaking of a Creator (Psalm 19:1-5; Rom 1:18-21), but this falls far short of unveiling the mind of God. More needs to be disclosed.

This "something more" is hinted at in the passage. Rather than allowing the world to unearth the deep things of God through its cherished means, thereby further bolstering its already bloated sense of excellence, Paul writes that it "pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." The truth came in a very particular way; it came through "the folly of what we preach," namely, "the word of the cross" (vs. 18). True wisdom is found in the gospel.

In the case of those who wear the spectacles of darkness, this appears incredibly foolish. How is it, after all, that the deepest truths of reality are found in a Jewish carpenter who walked the hills of Galilee? Or how can anyone take seriously the words of a man who died the humiliating and shameful death of a lowly criminal?

"Look there!" one exclaims. "See that man on the cross, the one sandwiched between the thieves?"

"Do you mean the naked and battered one in the middle, the one being mocked by those Jewish leaders? Yes, I see him."

"He is the Truth," I tell you. "The very Truth itself."

The other glances something strange, "Surely you jest."

"I do not."

"The man hanging there is hardly a king, let alone the King of kings. He is at best an object of scorn and ridicule."

"Well, I can assure you that He is a King."

"Sure he is."

The message of the cross, urges Paul, is foolishness to those who are perishing. The Jews demanded signs. The Greeks sitting in the Areopagus, entertaining the latest philosophical ideas, demanded wisdom. "But we preach Christ crucified," Paul exclaimed, "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles" (vs. 23).

It has pleased God to utterly decimate the sensibilities of the world by means of a crucified Savior, to provide the answer to humanity's deepest longings and needs in the most unlikely of ways, indeed, in the most pride abasing fashion. If they had eyes to see and ears to hear they would behold the glories of Him who died. They would understand the depths of their foolishness and gain some sense of the horror of their sin, perceiving their pitiful estate. But in seeing, they do not see. The cross is for them a joke, something to be mocked or brushed aside as insignificant. In one important respect, God is well pleased with this, for as Jesus prayed on one occasion, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children" (Mat 11:25).

God the Father purposively deepens the irony by calling sinners to His Son, where they come face to face with the depths of their sin and their need to completely transform their thinking. Nothing short of a revolution will do, as the presuppositions of autonomy run counter to the lordship of Christ. This is why Paul can write, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness,’ and again, ‘The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile’” (1 Cor 3:18-20). The problem, as has been stressed, is that the idolatry of autonomy not only renders the individual unable to correctly discern their need, but also how it is that in Christ, and in Christ alone, there is true wisdom (1 Cor 1:24, 30).¹²⁸ One might say that there is not enough wisdom found outside the sphere of Christ for the sinner to correctly identify the folly of their position. They are trapped in their idolatry, blinded by the god of this world, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4). This is why God must remove the veil covering their eyes. As it was in the beginning when God caused the light to shine in the darkness (Gen 1:2-4), so it is with the sinner’s heart. The Lord shines the light of His grace and truth directly into the heart of the rebel in order to grant the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). “We preach Christ crucified,” declared Paul, “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24).

Bridging the Epistemological Gap

Ultimately, the epistemological gap existing between competing absolutes is unable to be bridged, so far as it depends on

¹²⁸ *Sola Sapientia*. Or all wisdom is found in Christ alone.

the sinner to correctly weigh the evidence. This isn't to say that Christianity isn't the most rational position. It is. Everything points to Christ. But the sinner is like a paranoid schizophrenic, in the sense that he interprets everything in the light of his delusion. If you bring him evidence that his phone isn't being tapped, he'll reinterpret the data in a way that comports with his deepest belief. If pressed, he may even say, "You're in on it! I knew you were!"

As George McDonald once said, "To explain truth to him who loves it not is to give more plentiful material for misinterpretation."¹²⁹ The only way to break through such toxic circularity and correct the sinner's eyesight is for God to step in.

Natural revelation does objectify knowledge (Rom 1), thereby implanting within man a true sense of the divine,¹³⁰ but the information is inevitably suppressed and twisted (Rom 1:18). Therefore, at the end of the day, it is God alone who must crack the delusion, soften hearts, and provide sinners with new eyes so that they may come to their senses and "escape from the snare of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim 2:26 NIV).¹³¹

The Collision of "Would-be" Gods

¹²⁹ Sometime read through the book of John or Acts with the psychology of unbelief in mind. It is amazing how often evidence is ignored or twisted. For the Gospel of John consider: John 2:23-24; 3:1-20; 5:16-18; 5:30-47; 6:25-7:1; 7:1-44; 7:45-52; 8:12-59; 9:16-17, 22, 34; 10:19-21, 25-27; 11:45-46, 47-53; 12:37-43; 14:7; 15:18-19; 16:8-9; 18:37-38; 19:7, 11-12; 20:24. For the book of Acts consider: 2:13-14; 4:2, 13-18; 5:17, 33-34; 6:9-14; 7:51, 54, 9:23; 13:6-8, 44-45, 50; 14:1-2, 11-18, 19; 16:19; 17:5, 13, 17; 18:6; 19:9, 23-29; 22:21-22; 24:1-27; 26:24; 28:24.

¹³⁰ Alvin Plantinga has done some tremendous work in this area showing how the knowledge of God is what he calls properly basic. See his challenging but insightful book *Warranted Christian Belief*. For an easier read see Kelly Clark's *Return to Reason*.

¹³¹ Here again we see how the absolute sovereignty of God can alone contend with the "What if" problem. God is greater than chance, delusion, ignorance, doubt, or anything else claiming to be greater than His grace and power.

The appeal that we can all be gods might sound good on the surface. Who among the children of Adam, after all, doesn't feel the allure of doing things their own way? But as has been shown, the consequences are dire. Not only does autonomy destroy knowledge and plunge the sinner into a labyrinth of nihilism, but it inexorably leads to conflict. What happens, after all, when two of these "would-be" gods find themselves in a state of disagreement, standing, as it were, face to face, neither wanting to step aside to allow the other pass? What then? Shall they discuss the matter? Will they engage in rational discourse? But what if one of these gods has decided that rational discourse is overrated, perhaps a bit too sluggish? Suppose he, out of the grand standards of his own making, finds violence more satisfying and expedient? What then? Shall another god talk sense into this person? But isn't this merely an attempt to massage the "would-be" god's ideals, conform them to the standards of another god, or the collection of several gods? Couldn't the aggressive god say, "Ah, yes, I see that you want to me bow down to your self-originated standards. But alas, you are a lesser god, in my eyes, one I don't feel compelled to acknowledge."

This also is the great lie and failure of Satan's promise. If everyone is granted ultimacy, chaos follows. Like the fickle and capricious gods of ancient Rome, humans run about the globe holding the scepter of Satan's promise, acting the part of deity, each pursuing their own ends, crafting, ultimately, a grandiose play with their own ending. Each wants to do things their way, but when others demur, they're genuinely amazed, shocked when other "would-be" gods don't want to follow the program. Whether spoken audibly or not, each has a way of shouting, "No, I am God! Not you!"

The result is war (James 4:2). Whether on the national level, the community level, or even the familial level, the clash of "I want" or "I demand" leads to fighting, estrangement, hatred, and death. What does the "would-be" god ultimately want, after all? Complete power. But in order to accomplish this, detractors must be removed

or displaced, chained up or diminished. All of the other “gods” must be made subject to them, or at least rendered obsolete.

In order to gain greater insight into newspaper headlines, reflect on the satanic promise that men can be their own gods. This explains why the nations rage. This explains the subjugation of women, the enslavement of men, the expulsion of ethnicities, the slaughter of children, and the near incomprehensible outbursts of seemingly pointless evil. When men believe they are ultimate, truly ultimate, which is what Satan’s idea endorses, the rules of the game are inevitably determined by that same man’s desires.

For some, due to common grace, they consent to the laws of their particular land. Even here, however, such people are choosing to accept it, to acquiesce, at least for the time being, often until something ruffles their feathers.¹³² Others perceive the illusion for what it is and brazenly construct their own morality and formulate their own strident ambitions, which often lead to conflict and war, jail, or, sometimes, the spotlight of academia.¹³³ It all depends on how the gods around them feel. Some label them as crazy, others as heroes. This, it must be stressed, allows intrigued observers to argue the point long into the night, setting up one philosophy of fact against another.¹³⁴

¹³² For a fascinating and honest appraisal of the human race, seen through the eyes of a decorated reporter, and one who is a humanist, see the May 2nd, 2008 episode of *Point of Inquiry* with Chris Hedges. After covering the Middle East for years, he has come to the conclusion that Americans are essentially no better than anyone else, and would quickly degrade into unbridled anarchy, given the removal of governmental restraint. This can be found online at: <http://soundofdoctrine.wordpress.com/2010/05/11/i-don%E2%80%99t-believe-in-atheists-chris-hedges/>

¹³³ See the July 16th, 2011 episode of *Unbelievable*, for an interesting dialogue on the Darwinian strands that influenced Hitler: <http://www.premierradio.org.uk/shows/saturday/unbelievable.aspx> Consider also the thought of Michel Foucault or Nietzsche or Jeffrey Dahmer.

¹³⁴ One could talk about democracy, but when the people are the *Demas*, ultimately, it merely shifts the issue slightly.

There Can Be Only One

In order for “would-be” gods to be truly in charge, they must stand over all other gods. This highlights one of the grand truths of reality. There can be only one God, ultimately. It is unavoidable. Such is the nature of absolutes.

The irony for men is that by forsaking God as their Father, they have unwittingly acquired another father, but one that is abusive and exercises ungodly force over them. They believed that anarchy would insure their ultimacy. But the awful truth is that even among anarchists there always emerges a leader. In the case of humanity, their leader is Satan, a truly tyrannical being who doesn’t care one bit about their well-being. Satan fills his children with hatred and uses them for his own evil ends, sacrificing them with cruel intent. He cripples them for malevolent purposes, twists them and degrades them. There is no love in this father. Only evil. And since he possesses more power than men, even men in all their collective vastness, he rules over them with spite and unpredictability, not at all unlike the violent dictators that have ravaged the nations.

Chapter 8

-The Weakness of God and the Overthrow of Satan-

-Part I-

Haman's Noose

On the night before his meeting with King Xerxes and Esther, Haman, in accordance with the counsel of his friends and wife, had a seventy-five foot tall gallows built exclusively for the neck of Mordecai, the faithful Jew who would not bow the knee in his presence.

Through the cunning of Haman, an edict had already been sent forth, spelling the demise of the Jews. The outlying provinces were to “kill and annihilate all the Jews- young and old, woman and little children- on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods” (Esther 3:13 NIV). It was a time of great mourning and weeping and fasting for God's people. They were going to die.

One can almost picture Haman in his bed, listening to the sound of sawing and hammering, as the immense gallows were being constructed. One can imagine him replaying the image of Mordecai standing alone amid a sea of bent knees, refusing to pay homage to him. He no doubt pictured the obstinate Jew swinging in the noonday light, noose cinched tightly around his neck. He no doubt imagined what he would say before the onlookers, how he would humiliate Mordecai and satisfy the cravings of his vengeful soul.

The irony is that the very gallows built for Mordecai would be used against him. When the king learned of Haman's plot

through the courage and faith of Esther, Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He made it for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king" (Esther 7:9 NIV). Pleased with the suggestion, the king declared, "Hang him on it!" And as the Scriptures report with dripping irony, "So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai" (7:10).

The Gallows of History

God loves to reverse the schemes of the wicked.

Daniel's opponents certainly learned this truth. In the early morning hours, when king Darius found Daniel in good health without so much as a scratch, having spent the night in a den of ravenous lions, the Scriptures record that "At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lion's den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones" (Daniel 6:24).

This irony of reversals is captured often in the Psalms as well. Writing of the wicked, David says, "Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends" (Psalm 7:14-16). And again in Psalm 57:6, "They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves."

Defeating an enemy is a glorious thing. But the glory is made to shine even more brightly when an enemy falls prey to his own devices. This is partly what causes us to cheer all the more loudly when we read Esther, or when we read of David's enemies falling into their own pits. The ironic twist heightens their downfall.

So far as human history is a contest between two kingdoms, it is a tale not unlike that of Haman. At the very center of God's

dealings with Satan, the Serpent's most potent designs are turned against him. One might say that our history creaks with the sound of a taut rope swinging in the wind of God's providence. Satan fashions a noose for the neck of God's glory, but is himself hung on it; he digs a pit, but is made to fall into it.

The place where all this culminates is the cross. That is where the Serpent's head is definitively crushed. But before we delve into the subject, we need to back up and consider afresh that aspect of Lucifer's awful idea which promised power, that concept dubbed Satanic "omnipotence." In so doing we will be in a better position to appreciate how it was, and how it is, that God flips Satan's purposes around, thereby exalting His own name in all the earth, while reigning down shame on the Serpent's head.

Satanic "Omnipotence"

Lucifer believed that there was a power available to him by doing "That-which-God-cannot-do." Theologically speaking, this is called sin. The concept appeared to promise a new kind of power, even a unique type of power, for it was something never before utilized. As such, it led the angel to wonder what it could accomplish, if it were unleashed and allowed to run free. It was, Lucifer reasoned, something which the omnipotent God wasn't able to do. So it appeared to be, by very definition, supra-omnipotent.

Moreover, this new power, so it seemed, would allow an individual to usurp God's will. This would enable them to sidestep God's sovereignty and providential control, thereby effectively deifying the creature's will, making them a god. Men and angels would be the masters of their destiny, not God. That hope, perhaps more than anything else, seemed to promise the greatest potential. The power of autonomy would insure the ultimacy of one's own will. The individual could carve out a path of reality as he determined, exploring the dark side of the moon, as it were; a realm of unknown possibilities.

This, it appeared to the angel, was something extraordinarily powerful.

The Power of Darkness

Is it powerful?

At this point, it might be tempting to shout out, in true Sunday school fashion, “No!” But that would be wrong. The reality is that sin is powerful. Very powerful, in fact. So much so that Satan is called the “god of this age,” a title, if there ever was one, that speaks of influence and power. Just think of the extent of sin’s corruption. It has infected everything. Even the crowning pinnacle of God’s creation on earth, mankind, is twisted and enslaved and made subject to the will of Satan (2 Tim 2:25-26).

Along similar lines, Jesus can refer to His being led away by the guards and chief priests as the “power of darkness,” as well as the hour of darkness (Luke 22:52-53). Paul describes the demonic realm in terms of principalities and powers (Eph 6:12), a spiritual force against which no man can stand on his own. He can even describe this epoch of history as “this present evil age” (Gal 1:4; Eph 5:16). Paul’s entire ministry is likewise framed in terms of releasing people from the “power of Satan” (Acts 26:18).

If we had lived in the days of Noah when the thoughts of men were evil continually, and if we were to stand on the bow of that great ark and stretch out our gaze across the watery surface, knowing that at that moment all human flesh had perished as a result of sin, we would surely know something of the awful power of sin. The footprint of sin is everywhere.

It is to be observed, therefore, that evil is not only real but terribly powerful; though not powerful in the sense of creating order, or beautifying things, or imparting life, or promoting human flourishing. It is a negative power, destructive and terrifying, capable of perverting good at an alarming rate. Someone may take a year crafting a finely built violin, but have it reduced to ashes in mere moments, when placed in the hands of an evil person. Why is

destruction like that? Why is it so easy? The same is true with families, government, the arts, holiness, work, the soul, the mind, entertainment and anything and everything else inhabiting creation.

The most potent aspect of sin, however, is death itself (Heb 2:14-15). Through the power of death, life is radically warped and displaced. Entire personalities are affected, distorted and misshapen into something tragically other. Spiritually speaking, the Scriptures describe this as being dead in sin (Eph 2:1). It is a paradoxical state of affairs, whereby the person's heart continues to beat, while inwardly he is spiritually dead. Their soul is like a breathing carcass. In the case of humans, their bodies can be destroyed, causing the life of a man to spill out, leaving behind a fleshly tent, unoccupied and still. Most startling of all, this can be accomplished by the hands of others. Men can and do kill for nearly any reason and in nearly every imaginable way.

Evil is responsible for this horrific truth, and it is a deadly power.

The Seed and History

Thankfully it isn't the only power at play in history. Paul writes in the first chapter of Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom 1:16a).

Following on the heels of man's fall into sin, God spoke the first words of gospel hope in Genesis 3:15. As has already been noted, this prophetic word centered on the destruction of the Serpent. This means that in one very important sense the good news is all about a struggle between opposing forces. A battle exists where evil thrashes under the foot of God's power, biting and writhing, seeking to somehow destroy the threat. The conflict began with God's declaration to the Serpent. This is where the battle lines were drawn. A judgment was uttered, and it was a promise of eventual defeat. It is as if God was saying to the Serpent: "So you think the power of sin can thwart my plans? Let us see. There is going to be a man, a seed of the woman, who is going to crush your

head and defeat you. See if you can stop it from happening.”¹³⁵ Human history, therefore, provides the fertile context for the display of God’s power over against the powers of darkness. And it is a contest centering largely on, if not exclusively on, the seed of the woman.

Smite the Seed

This is more than likely why Abel died.

When Abel’s offering was accepted over his brother’s, Cain’s face fell and he became very angry (Gen 4:5). Here it is evident that jealousy played a crucial role. That being said, it isn’t a coincidence that murder immediately follows the narrative of the fall. If one imagines things from the perspective of the kingdom of darkness, the children of Eve would have been objects of unparalleled concern. Since Cain belonged to the Serpent, it was only natural for Satan to set his sights on the younger brother, Abel, the man whose sacrifice was accepted by God. As has been noted, death is the preeminent power of sin. It only makes sense for Satan to squelch the threat of faithful Abel by killing him.

The seed of the woman, however, is both collective (Gen 17:7) and singular (Gal 3:16), and so while Abel was of the godly lineage, he was not the one destined to crush the head of the Serpent.

¹³⁵ Note again that in Genesis 3:14-15 God is speaking to the Serpent. The promise, no doubt, is meant to encourage and provide hope to fallen man, and in that respect the protoevangelium is anthropocentric. But if we take seriously the satanic presence, the gospel announcement cannot be viewed as anything less than a direct response to Satan himself. In this respect, the gospel is simultaneously grace and judgment, earthly and heavenly, a challenge and a promise. In this vein, John Murray writes, “It is surely significant... that the first promise of redemptive grace, the first beam of redemptive light that fell upon our fallen first parents, was in terms of the destruction of the tempter.” *Redemption- Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 49.

Nevertheless, one failed attempt to assassinate the Messiah would not deter future attempts. At every turn, Satan tried to eliminate the seed of the woman and derail the purposes of God.

With this in mind, the lineages found in Scripture aren't recorded to bore readers with ancient statistics, as if the fathers were eager to pull out old family albums and tediously explain the happenings of their brothers and cousins. Rather, the line of the seed is chronicled for the purpose of evidence. As the family tree courses through history, forking and expanding, dying and flourishing, we see it assaulted with the sword, temptation, and tribulation. We are watching to see if the powers of sin can thwart the plans of God. Can autonomy trump God's will? Can death thwart the seed?

Tracing a finger across the lines of descent, murderous hatred and warlike hostility is utilized with keen regularity in the conflict with the seed of the woman. Esau is seen uttering, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob" (Gen 27:41). Joseph is thrown into a pit by the hands of his brothers, left to die. A new king arises in Egypt "who did not know about Joseph" (Ex 1:8), and who, when feeling threatened by the ever growing numbers of the Jews, subjects the people of God to hard labor, intent on bottling them up. When they continue to multiply, Pharaoh orders his people to throw every boy born to the Hebrews into the Nile (Ex 1:22). After their release, Pharaoh pursues the people into the wilderness, bent on annihilating them. Once in the wilderness, Amalek bursts on the scene, attacking the Israelites at Rephidim.

On it goes, century after century, bloodlust and intrigue, political maneuverings and idolatrous appeals, clear up until the time of the greater Moses, when Herod, like Pharaoh of old, issued an edict commanding all the male children under two years of age to be killed in Bethlehem and the surrounding regions (Matt 2:16), all in the hopes of destroying the child spoken of by the prophet Micah.

Thwarted

In spite of the maneuverings of Satan, the seed of the woman is preserved. Jacob flees and receives a blessing. Joseph through a surprising series of events not only survives, but is elevated to the place of leadership in order to help his people during a severe famine. Moses is likewise kept from the murderous hands of the Egyptians. Sent down the Nile in a basket, he ends up, incredibly, in the hands of Pharaoh's daughter, who in turn raises the future deliverer in the courts of Egypt, thus preparing him for the crucial days ahead. And so long as Moses' hands remained lifted in the wilderness, Joshua's troops were able to push back the fierce Amalekites, eventually securing a victory and a promise from God that the memory of Amalek would be completely wiped out.

In light of such tribulations and triumphs, the Psalmist declares, "Let Israel now say— 'Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me' (Psalm 129:1-2). Time and again, the seed is preserved by the hand of God, causing His people to shout, as Psalm 129 goes on to say, "The LORD is righteous; He has cut the cords of the wicked" (vs. 4).

In all of this the primary concern is the question of power. The issue is how God combats evil; how He overpowers it; how He shows His strength and the might of His hand, thwarting and usurping the powers of darkness. The temptation here would be to turn immediately to the cross where this power is displayed most poignantly, thereby leaving the intervening centuries largely undeveloped. Yet the period of the Old Testament is a rich history, and is preparatory, establishing a variety of motifs for the climax. The world is being shown how God is going to act when the fullness of time arrives. Ignoring it would promote a kind of theological malnutrition.

The challenge is that the history is vast, and even if one were to dedicate an entire volume to the subject, it would be voluminous. Glancing to my right, I'm confronted with a shelf full of books, many of which are robust commentaries unpacking and explaining the unfolding drama. It is truly a daunting expanse of time. The

thrust of what is to follow, therefore, will consist largely in highlighting a few of the themes that will help readers better recognize and appreciate God's dealings with the seed of the Serpent, and by extension, the Serpent himself. Since history is governed by one Lord, and since the Scriptures, while written by many different individuals, is ultimately composed by one Author, it shouldn't come as a surprise to find parallels between the cross and the various manifestations of power leading up to that event. The crushing blow of Genesis 3:15 is, therefore, foreshadowed in a variety of ways throughout the OT, signaling how the Seed is going to mortally wound the enemy. The question is how?

The Seed of the Woman and Pharaoh

One wonders if on the day when Moses was leading his father-in-law's flock along the slopes of mount Horeb, to that remote place where God spoke from the flaming bush, if there was a demon watching from afar, listening intently to God's announcement that He was going to rescue the Jews from the hand of the Egyptians and bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey. Would an eighty-year-old man living in the dry and desolate region of Midian have been flagged by Satan? Did Satan commission at least one demon to watch the happenings of this elderly Jew? It is hard to say. It is interesting to think that there was another pair of eyes watching the exchange on the side of that mountain; that there was at least one fallen angel within earshot soaking in the conversation, watching the man Moses remove his sandals and receive news that the people of God would be freed from Egyptian tyranny. It is likewise interesting to think that when the demon heard God say, "I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go," he immediately hurried off intent on informing his general that war was coming.

In the conflict between God and Pharaoh, one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest display of power in all the OT is portrayed. It is a truly pivotal moment in redemptive history. In terms of providing a template for the future, the encounter proves nothing short of paradigmatic, as the entire confrontation reveals a crucial component of God's strategy for dealing with the seed of the Serpent. In order to get at this, we first need to explore the peculiarities of this mighty display and show why God chose to manifest the strength of His arm the way He did. Afterwards, it needs to be asked what this has to do with Satan, or, more specifically, how it is that God's encounter with Pharaoh can be reasonably projected onto the larger script of history.

Humiliation

We begin with the issue of power. From the standpoint of brute force, the plagues poured out on Egypt were in every way astonishing. Yet for all their flare it would be a mistake to think of the miracles as simply fireworks, displays of power meant only to illicit "Ohs" and "Ahs." The reality is that the confrontation was a carefully crafted response meant to humiliate and mock the powers of Egypt.

In a series of fascinating and penetrating lectures, Dr. John Currid, professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, masterfully details how God's interactions with Pharaoh directly assault and humiliate not only the pagan king's pride and honor, but the Egyptian gods swirling in the background. The perspective is termed polemical theology.

Since Moses was raised and trained "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), he possessed a thorough knowledge of their religious customs, literature, and overall way of life. He was a man who understood how the enemy thought. So when Moses penned the book of Exodus, he carefully and artistically recounted the triumph and truth of Yahweh's victory in such a way so as to mock and taunt the so-called powers of Egypt. His narrative contains a

number of ironic jabs. Since most don't sit around reading *The Book of the Dead* for fun, the average person isn't acquainted with Egyptian culture. As a result the irony is missed. But for those well versed in Egyptology, like Dr. Currid, their trained eye is able to pick out the subtle threads of irony scattered throughout the Exodus account.

In order to capture something of the polemical element, a few examples will help illustrate the position.¹³⁶

The Hand of the LORD

Ancient Egyptian texts frequently described the power and authority of the various Pharaohs in terms of their possessing a strong arm or hand, especially in contexts where the enemy is being conquered. One such text describes him as "The one who destroys his enemies with his arm."¹³⁷

Interestingly, in the Exodus account we find the same motif scattered throughout the narrative, but instead of describing the might of Pharaoh, the concept is applied to God. For example, Exodus 3:20a says, "So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it." In Exodus 7:4 we read, "Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment." And again, "Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your [the LORD's] arm" (Ex 15:6a).

In a bold move meant to make a sharp theological point, Moses takes the Pharaonic terminology and applies the concept to

¹³⁶ I am, of course, greatly indebted to Dr. Currid for the following examples and have relied heavily on his material. To learn more about his viewpoint, I would highly recommend his three part lecture series entitled, "Crass Plagiarism? The Problem of the Relationship of the Old Testament to the Ancient Near Eastern Literature." It is a true gem. Find it online at: http://thirdmill.org/sermons/series.asp/au/joh_currid/srs/Crass%20Plagiarism

¹³⁷ See lecture one in Professor Currid's lecture.

God. In this he is highlighting that it is the LORD and not Pharaoh who is the true King and God. In light of this, Dr. Currid asks, "What better way for the Exodus writer to describe God's victory over Pharaoh, and as a result His superiority, than to use Hebrew derivations or Hebrew counterparts to Egyptian expressions that symbolize Egyptian royal power? Doesn't that just slap Pharaoh in the face?"¹³⁸ Indeed it does.

The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

Another recurring theme scattered throughout the Exodus account is the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. When, for example, the Israelites had been let go and were journeying in the desert, God tells Moses, "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them [the Israelites], and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD" (Ex 14:4).

In Hebrew as well as Egyptian culture, the heart functioned as the essence of a person, or the spiritual center of the individual. In Egyptian thought this was especially emphasized. "Indeed," writes Beale, "these aspects became so emphasized that the heart came to be viewed as the 'seat of destiny,' determining one's life. It is probably because of this apparent autonomy of the heart that it came to be seen as a 'second being of man, next to and outside him,' and it even came to be said 'that 'the heart' of a man [is] his God himself.'" The heart was also seen as the divine instrument through which a god directed a man and the organ by which a man could receive and comprehend divine commandments."¹³⁹

In order to flesh out the implications of this belief, a well known story in *The Book of the Dead* called *The Papyrus of Ani* needs to be explored. The Egyptians believed that when a person died their hearts would be weighed and tested on the balances of truth

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9 (Trinity Journal 5 NS, 1984), 133.

and righteousness. In *The Papyrus of Ani*, an Egyptian by the name of Ani dies and enters the afterlife where he must present himself before the seat of judgment. There in the hands of Thoth, the judge of truth, rests a balance. On one side of the balance sits a feather. The other side of the scale is empty. This is where Ani's heart will be placed. If Ani's heart is virtuous and pure, it will find balance with the feather. If it is not, then he will be given over to Ammit, a horrific female goddess waiting to devour condemned sinners. Before the moment of testing, Ani pleads with his heart, urging it to speak well of him. On plate three of *The Papyrus of Ani*, we read of him saying,

“Oh my heart which I had from my mother! Oh my heart which I had from my mother! O my heart of my different ages! Do not stand up as a witness against me, do not be opposed to me in the tribunal, do not be hostile to me in the presence of the Keeper of the Balance, for you are my Ka which was in my body, the protector who made my members hale... Do not make my name stink to Entourage who make men. Do not tell lies about me in the presence of the god.”¹⁴⁰

What is interesting is that when Moses speaks of God hardening Pharaoh's heart, he uses a few different words. One of those words is *kabad* or *kabēd*.¹⁴¹ It means to make something heavy or weighty. In the case of Pharaoh, this is a devastating critique, as it was believed that Pharaoh was as god, the incarnation of Re or Horus. As such, he was thought to be untainted and perfect, sinless. When someone, for example, wanted to enter the palace they would say that they were “invoking this perfect god and exalting his beauty.” But when we read of Pharaoh hardening his heart, and when we learn that it was God's purpose to harden Pharaoh's heart, we see the balances, as it were, flipping over. Pharaoh is anything but perfect, let alone sinless. His heart is heavy with unrighteousness and worthy of condemnation.

¹⁴⁰ The Egyptian Book of the Dead (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 24.

¹⁴¹ Ex 8:15, 32; 9:7, 34; 10:1; 14:4.

What is more, the god Re was thought to be sovereign over the hearts of men. Since Pharaoh was supposedly the incarnation of this deity, it naturally followed that the heart of the living Pharaoh was sovereign over creation. But when Yahweh assaults this belief by exercising sway over the king's heart, He shows in no uncertain terms who is really Lord over all. God alone is the sovereign of the universe. Not Pharaoh. In this one is reminded that "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will" (Prov 21:1).

The Plagues

In the case of all ten plagues, the polemic continues. Only two of the plagues will be highlighted here.

Consider first the plague of frogs. In Exodus 8:1-4, it says,

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.'"

It might seem rather strange to modern ears, but ancient Egyptian culture viewed the frog as a symbol of divine power and fertility. One of their gods, Heket, was a female deity with the body of a woman and the head of frog. According to their tradition, she was the spouse of the creator god Khnum, a being who crafted people on a potter's wheel. He fashioned them and she blew life into them. Pregnant women sometimes wore amulets depicting the female goddess. They were believed to offer protection. She could supposedly ward off evil spirits during childbirth and provide

security during labor. Oddly enough, she was also responsible for frog control. “She was to control,” according to Dr. Currid, “the multiplication of frogs in Egypt by protecting the crocodile population who ate frogs.”

But what happened during this plague? Dr Currid explains, “Yahweh simply overwhelms Heket and causes her to be impotent in her task. She cannot repel or resist Yahweh’s overpowering regeneration of frogs.”¹⁴² God was essentially producing frogs so rapidly that the symbol of divine power and fertility became a curse. It was as if God was saying, “You want fertility? I’ll show you fertility.” In the end, after Pharaoh asked Moses to pray to the Lord to take away the frogs, it says, “And the LORD did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank” (Ex 8:13-14). In this God demonstrated that He, not Heket, is the true giver of life and the true source of power.

Consider another example. In the plague of darkness it reads, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt’” (Ex 10:21).

Of all the gods of Egypt, Amun-Ra was the chief deity. He was the sun god, rising in the east each day, symbolizing new life and resurrection. In a song of praise entitled a *Hymn to Amun-Ra*, a sense of his supposed majesty is provided,

“HAIL to thee, Amun-Ra, Lord of the thrones of the earth, the oldest existence, ancient of heaven, support of all things; Chief of the gods, lord of truth; father of the gods, maker of men and beasts and herbs; maker of all things above and below; Deliverer of the sufferer and oppressed, judging the poor; Lord of wisdom, lord of mercy; most loving, opener of every eye, source of joy, in whose goodness the gods rejoice, thou whose name is hidden.”

¹⁴² Ibid., Lecture three.

But of course, when Moses stretched out his hand and ushered in complete darkness for three days, Amun-Ra was powerless to provide the Egyptians with light. This was true of Pharaoh as well, who, was thought to be the incarnation of Ra. He couldn't summon so much as one ray of light. Like everyone else, save the Israelites, he was forced to grope around in the darkness. The sun was not under his control.

Perhaps most ironic of all, just before the Red Sea collapsed and crushed the Egyptians, Moses records one seemingly insignificant detail. Exodus 14:27 reads, "So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea." The final blow came at daybreak "when the morning appeared," that moment in the pursuit when the Egyptians would have looked at the rising sun in the east and thought of Ra, their sun god. They probably felt emboldened. But their god was powerless to save them. The waters came crashing down, engulfing them in a torrent of water. As their bodies washed up on the shore, the exclamation point of God's power was made exceedingly evident (Ex 14:30-31).

His Very Great Strength

In response, the people of God sang and danced like never before. And what did they shout about? God's strength. His awesome deeds. His mighty right hand. Listen again to their song.

"Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name. "Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went

down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.' You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode" (Exodus 15:1-13)

From beginning to end, God's power is praised, for He confronted the authorities of Egypt and prevailed over them, divesting them of honor. They weren't just beaten. They were humiliated, mocked even. This is precisely what Exodus 10:2 says. The signs were performed so that Moses could tell his children and his grandchildren "how [the LORD] made a mockery of the Egyptians, and how [the LORD] performed [His] signs among them; that you may know that I am the LORD" (NASB).¹⁴³ The signs and wonders had an aim. Everyone knew it too, including Pharaoh himself. We know this because, amazingly, before the seventh plague, God instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh,

"But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exodus 9:16).

¹⁴³ Laughing at the wicked runs along similar veins (Psalm 2:4; 37:13).

This wasn't the first time God outlined His intentions. Before Egypt was struck with plagues, God told Moses, "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring my armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments" (7:3-4, NIV). Likewise, near the end of the encounter with Pharaoh, when the Israelites were nearly ready to pass through the Red Sea, God assured Moses, "And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen" (Exodus 14:17).¹⁴⁴

In all this we learn that Elijah isn't the only one capable of mocking a false deity. As the prophets of Baal presented their offering, calling upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying out, "O Baal, answer us!" limping around in frustration, even cutting themselves, Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened" (1 Kings 18:27). Has not God done the same with the Egyptian gods?¹⁴⁵

Cosmic Dimensions

¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, the push into the Promised Land is described in similar terms. See Exodus 34:10.

¹⁴⁵ One will, of course, search the love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 in vain for a statement describing love in terms of mocking one's enemies. In fact, it says that love is not arrogant, or *perpereuomai*, boastful. Someone might frown upon all this and argue that such behavior is not compatible with a loving God. But of course one must not forget that God is perfectly just and holy. In the case of those who sinfully exalt themselves, God is not at all pleased with them. And so He opposes them. He exposes them for what they really are, which is a way of bearing witness to the truth. So it is not unbecoming for the One who possesses all power and glory to accentuate this fact in the face of sin. Sin is in its very nature ironical, as we have already pointed out. Pride causes one to be eventually brought low. There is no incongruity, therefore, between love and justice, or between love and abasement.

This is why a link should be drawn between God's dealings with Pharaoh and the kingdom of darkness. In both Exodus 12:12 and Numbers 33:4, it states that God executed judgment on all the gods of Egypt. It would be easy enough to draw a parallel between Pharaoh's kingdom and the kingdom of darkness, as he was undoubtedly of the seed of the serpent. Yet when it is borne in mind that the LORD was humiliating the gods of Egypt, a cosmic dimension is brought to the fore. What stands behind such false religion, after all? Are not the Egyptian doctrines demonic in nature? Is not Satan intimately involved in the affairs of such pagans? Was he not trying to squelch the seed of the woman?

Proverbs 15:25a reads, "The LORD tears down the house of the proud." James and Peter say something similar when they write, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Pharaoh's house was a very proud one, but the proudest house of them all is the kingdom of darkness. This kingdom, which manifests itself throughout human history, must be utterly torn down (Dan 2:44-45).

It is, therefore, not a stretch to say that God's dealings with Pharaoh sent a direct message to Satan. It appears entirely fitting to say that the defeat of Pharaoh was a micro-crushing foreshadowing the ultimate crushing. Thus it can be safely deduced, given God's dealings in Exodus, that the crushing blow of Genesis 3:15 will somehow mock and humiliate the Serpent.¹⁴⁶

The Seed of the Woman and the Sword

¹⁴⁶ If Exodus 10:1-2 is combined with Ephesians 3:10 another interesting picture emerges. In the first passage, God intends for his wonders to be remembered throughout Israel's generations. In other words, He has a larger audience in mind than simply the Jews living under Pharaoh's rule. In the same way, but on a much larger scale, the wonders poured out on Egypt were intended for a heavenly audience, angels who were doubtless watching the exchange with much interest.

The lessons of the past do not cease with Moses and Pharaoh. Other themes likewise anticipate the nature of the crushing blow. During the days of the Old Covenant, it wasn't uncommon for the people of God to unsheathe their swords and literally strike down the enemies of God. One can almost hear the maidens in the street singing, "Saul has struck down his thousands, but David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7)! Abraham knew what it meant to ride on the back of a camel with a raised sword, as did Joshua when he entered the Promised Land, commissioned to destroy entire cities. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was, as the Scriptures record, "a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds. He struck down two ariels of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he struck down an Egyptian, a handsome man. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and won a name beside the three mighty men" (2 Sam 23:20-22). The list could be multiplied at length (Heb 11:32-34). Suffice it to say that on any reading of the OT, there is much bloodshed.

Modern man often struggles with the sight of blood. He looks upon the OT and views it with disgust, usually calling it barbaric or vindictive- an ignorant way of handling "interpersonal problems." Such is the frame of the liberal mind. He feels as if God needs a lesson in modern diplomacy; or perhaps there needs to be an inter-cosmic Geneva Convention, occupied, no doubt, by a staff of tender-hearted and enlightened thinkers. But of course God isn't in need of their counsel.

Two things should be kept in mind here. First, there is absolutely nothing wrong with dispensing justice. It is entirely within the rights, and is even the duty, of God as perfect Judge to enact justice. When Pharaoh's army is crushed in the Red Sea, or when the walls of Jericho comes tumbling down, or when God commands David to conquer the Philistines, there is no room for complaint. Even Satan himself cannot justifiably argue with the decision. He may complain, but he cannot complain with cause, for

grace cannot be demanded. If God chooses to end the life of a condemned sinner by stopping his heart, it is fair. Likewise, if God commissions the Jews to strike down an idolatrous city, it is fair.

Insofar as modern man complains about the use of the sword, he is subtly downplaying the enmity that exists between light and darkness, and by extension, the antithesis. “Why get so cranky about all this sin?” it is thought. In this modern man wants a mediating position. They want a form of justice that conforms to their sensibilities, one, no doubt, that doesn’t point a sword in their direction. But of course such sentiments inevitably fall right into the lap of the awful idea. In fact, it is merely the awful idea cloaked. They want to function as final arbiters of truth and righteousness. Instead of coming right out and saying it, they instead gasp and frown and wag their fingers at God’s justice.

Secondly, and rather ironically, modern man’s aversion to such “barbarism” is quite strange, given the implications and application of his worldview. I don’t know if there’s a better quote on the planet than G. K. Chesterton’s, when it comes to pinpointing the inconsistency and savagery of the liberal mind, or the new rebel, as he puts it. He says,

“But the new rebel is a skeptic, and will not entirely trust anything. He has no loyalty; therefore he can never be really a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies a moral doctrine of some kind; and the modern revolutionist doubts not only the institution he denounces, but the doctrine by which he denounces it. Thus he writes one book complaining that imperial oppression insults the purity of women, and then he writes another book (about the sex problem) in which he insults it himself. He curses the Sultan because Christian girls lose their virginity, and then curses Mrs. Grundy because they keep it. As a politician, he will cry out that war is a waste of life, and then, as a philosopher, that all life is a waste of time. A Russian pessimist will denounce a policeman for

killing a peasant, and then prove by the higher philosophical principles that the peasant ought to have killed himself. A man denounces marriage as a lie, and then denounces aristocratic profligates for treating it as a lie. He calls a flag a bauble, and then blames the oppressors of Poland or Ireland because they take away that bauble. The man of this school goes first to a political meeting, where he proves that savages are treated as if they were beasts; then he takes his hat and umbrella and goes on to a scientific meeting, where he proves that they practically are beasts. In short, the modern revolutionist, being an infinite skeptic, is always engaged in undermining his own mines. In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on morality; in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men. Therefore the modern man in revolt has become practically useless for all purposes of revolt. By rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything.”¹⁴⁷

One need only report that the 20th century has been one of the bloodiest centuries in human history. And it occurred on the watch of modern man.¹⁴⁸

Now it would be easy to further entangle oneself with this subject, answering objections and unpacking the intricacies of God’s justice. All of that is good and necessary and has its place, but such meanderings would take us too far afield.¹⁴⁹ The reality to be highlighted is simply this: In the confrontation with the seed of the Serpent, the sword has played a vital role. There has been sharp

¹⁴⁷ Orthodoxy (Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2001), 53-54.

¹⁴⁸ What shall we say about those who have been killed while in their mother’s womb? Millions upon millions have died as a result of liberal man’s “sophistication.” He plunges poison into the skulls of the pre-born baby, or rips them apart with medical instruments and doesn’t call this barbaric? Oh, how deep are the inconsistencies of the modern man!

¹⁴⁹ While it isn’t the main concern of the book, I am particularly fond of the insights of Dr. Poythress in his chapter on holy war, which can be found in “The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses.”

conflict throughout the ages (bloody conflict!) and God has dealt justice to the enemy through violent means. In light of this, it can be safely inferred, based on the use of the sword,¹⁵⁰ that the crushing blow of Genesis 3:15 will involve, as one would expect given the imagery of a crushed head, violence and justice and the shedding of blood.

The Human Element

Throughout the conflict with the Serpent's seed, God has consistently worked through people to accomplish His ends. Instead of appearing before Pharaoh or dispatching a battalion of angels to wipe him off the face of the earth, God sent Moses. Instead of marching into the Promised Land and tossing the enemies out with a flick of the wrist, He sent in Joshua. Prophets likewise spoke in behalf of the Lord, and kings in the line of David sat on the throne, which pictured the throne of God (1 Ch 29:23).

Divine power is directly mediated through human agents, and it is a fact that marks the entirety of redemptive history. In light of this, it can be reasonably assumed that the crushing blow of Genesis 3:15 will involve, as one would expect given the use of the word "offspring," a man through whom God's power flows.

But on the flip side, one would also expect there to be an element of weakness, given the human element. Even in the case of the strongest of men, they are still just that. They are men. As the Psalmist declares, "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). Man is not the equal of an angel. In fact, 10,000 men probably do not equal the power and strength of one angel.

But the weakness goes deeper than the dust of man's natural frame. When God called Abram to inherit the land, he was seventy-five years old and hardly a beacon of morality. In the case of Moses,

¹⁵⁰ Or giant hailstones (Joshua 10:11), or fire and brimstone, or torrents of water, for that matter.

after murdering an Egyptian, he fled to the wilderness of Midian where he tended flocks for forty years. It wasn't until Moses could blow out eighty candles on his birthday that the Lord called him to his task. David wasn't the most likely pick either. When Samuel looked upon David's oldest brother, Eliab, Samuel thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD" (1 Sam 16:6). But he wasn't the man. God selected the youngest of the family, the most unlikely candidate, so far as appearances were concerned. David was an unassuming teenager tending his father's sheep in the pasture. Probably most striking of all, the very nation of Israel, the sum total of Abraham's children, were anything but mighty and praiseworthy. Listen again to God's description of them,

"Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people" (Deut 9:4-6).

In another place He says,

"It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples" (Deut 7:7).

Not even the Messiah Himself would enter this world with the majestic flare of royalty. Isaiah writes, "[He] had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2b). God loves to accomplish great things

through human weakness. He doesn't take the dust of the world to accomplish His ends, but He takes the dust of the dust, the nearly laughable of this world to trample snakes. In light of this, it can be safely inferred that the crushing blow of Genesis 3:15 will involve a curious intermingling of divine power and surprising weakness.

And of course with weakness comes suffering. After describing the Messiah's unspectacular appearance, Isaiah immediately goes on to say, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3). In the conflict with the Serpent, history bursts at the seams with tales of suffering. From the blood of Abel to the tears of Jeremiah and well beyond, the seed of the woman experiences bone crushing pain. Such is the forecast of Genesis 3:15. The imagery of a snake sinking its venomous fangs into the heel of the Seed beckons the OT saint to ponder what manner of suffering the Messiah would face.

A Portrait of the Future

In summary, the following observations, which are admittedly select and underdeveloped, allow one to conclude that the crushing blow will:

- Involve an ironic reversal whereby the schemes of the wicked one are turned against him.
- Mock and humiliate the Serpent.
- Be violent.
- Be just.
- Be divinely powerful.
- Be mediated through human weakness and suffering.
- Serve to more greatly elevate God's fame and glory.

Before this chapter is closed out and attention is directed to the cross where these points converge and amplify, a quick word needs to be said about Satan's freedom. Evil is not granted absolute free reign in this battle. The God of Abraham is not as the Open Theists conceive Him. God is in control. Complete control.¹⁵¹ Satan, for all his pomp and promise, recognizes and submits to the sovereign rule of God. When God lays down a prohibition, it will be followed. Take Job. Everything that happened to this righteous man came to pass because God allowed it to come to pass. Satan couldn't touch the man, as God had placed a hedge around him (Job 1:10). In order for Satan to afflict him, he had to first receive permission (vs. 12). Peter provides us with a similar example. In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus tells Peter, "'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers'" (NASB). Satan isn't allowed to do everything he wants when he wants. Restrictions are placed on him. Permission must be granted.

The challenge, therefore, is how to understand the struggle between the dominion of darkness and God's sovereign control. If Satan is thought of as being confined to a box, unable to do anything, then one might wonder how it is that God's wisdom is displayed to the heavenly realms. It wouldn't be hard, after all, to beat an enemy that is chained to a wall and gagged. Likewise, it would be hard to imagine the angels exalting God's wisdom, if the enemy's power isn't genuinely confronted and beaten. As a result, it appears entirely fitting to say that there must be sufficient space granted for Satan to wield his awful idea, an amount of freedom suitable for the intended outcome of Ephesians 3:10.

Here it would do the student of Scripture well to affirm the Westminster Confession of Faith when it says:

¹⁵¹ For a more thorough treatment of the subject, I would recommend John Frame's "The Doctrine of God," or Carson's work, "Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility."

“God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”¹⁵²

The interplay between God’s sovereignty and human (or angelic) responsibility is surely a mysterious doctrine. Both are true, even if we cannot see how they relate exactly. An appropriate metaphor may be a young child trying to understand an algebra problem. The youngster, having just learned his ABCs and 123s, happily affirms both letters and numbers. But when presented with the problem $X+4=7$, he cannot imagine how in the world a letter could be a number. His mind simply cannot wrap itself around the issue. So it is with God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. The answer to the problem is like the letter X.

That being said, both humans and angels possess genuine freedom. We are able to perform, for the most part, exactly what we want to do. So it is with evil men and angels. God grants wide freedom, a freedom that satisfies the concerns of any creature. As the Confession puts it, violence isn’t offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of secondary causes taken, but rather established.

But let it be clearly stated: Satan believes that autonomy *can* trump God’s sovereignty. He believes that by “doing-that-which-God-cannot-do,” a thread in the fabric of reality can be pulled, thereby unraveling God’s purposes, so that God *cannot* freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass. If God would only press the hold button on final judgment and allow him room to act, the strength of his so-called power would be vindicated.

When the vast matrix of history with all its twists and turns, with all its countless millions of volitional creatures making genuine

¹⁵² Chapter III.I

choices, interacting with and beholding the unfolding drama is set on display, the stage is perfectly suited for establishing beyond all doubt whether or not Satan's awful idea is in fact awful. There will be no grounds on which the wicked can say, "His judgment isn't fair, because I was coerced," or, "I never had an opportunity to display the power of my position."

Chapter 9

-The Weakness of God and the Overthrow of Satan-

-Part 2-

For centuries Satan's schemes and strategies, while frustrated and combated in a variety of ways, nevertheless enjoyed a certain measure of success. The kingdom was split. The Davidic line was marred with ungodliness. Pagan nations marched on the Temple. Holy men continued to sin and carry within their bodies the decaying power of sin. While the promises of God were continually trumpeted through the prophets, many of these spokesmen were killed, being persecuted by their own countrymen. But most importantly, the covenant promises remained largely unfulfilled, standing like sign posts on a highway, advertizing the future. For Satan that was alright. Hold the promises down. Thwart them. Trample them with evil. Don't let them come to pass. Stop the crushing blow.

In this chapter, we come finally to that great moment in time when the promised One enters onto the stage of history, intent on fulfilling all that was written. The focus will center largely on the events leading up to the cross, as well as the cross itself where the back of Satan is broken. It is here where God's power is most clearly seen.

In The Fullness of Time

One can but only wonder what first caught Satan's attention that something big was astir. Perhaps it was the angelic meeting

with Zechariah announcing that he and his wife would have a son, a son to be named John, a man who would, as the angel described, “go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17, NIV). That, no doubt, sounded an alarm. But that was nothing compared to what occurred in the little town of Nazareth. There Gabriel visited a young peasant girl named Mary, bringing news unimaginable. “You will be with child,” he informed her, “and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:31-33, NIV).

That statement, if heard, would certainly have brought the kingdom of darkness to full attention, causing entire legions to be dispatched to the area. But even if the meeting was held in secret, unobserved like Joseph’s dream (Matthew 1:20), the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth wouldn’t have slipped their attention. Enemy scouts would have heard the sound of Mary praising God’s mighty arm and covenantal faithfulness (Luke 1:46-55). They would have heard her say, “For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:48b-49a).

“*What great things?*” they must have thought.

Then at the birth of John, they would have heard the startling prophetic utterance of Zachariah trumpeted loudly, no doubt, as his tongue had been silenced for so very long. This couldn’t have been misinterpreted:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the

hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days” (Luke 1:68-75).

The evidence continued to mount until it became unmistakable. Angels appeared to shepherds, announcing good news of great joy (Luke 2:10-12). Simeon, a man who was assured he would see the Christ before the end of his life, held the child in his arms and praised God openly (Luke 2:28-32). Anna, a prophetess of the tribe of Ashur “gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38, NIV).

The time had clearly come, and the seed of the Serpent acted quickly (Rev 12:4). Herod, a ruthless man, having previously murdered his wife, his three sons, and a host of other family members, became disturbed at the news of the child’s birth, along with “all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:3). He no doubt had his own diabolical reasons for killing the child, but it’s hard to imagine Satan not playing an influential role in the slaughter. Murder has been a part of the satanic playbook since the beginning. It isn’t a surprise, therefore, to learn that Herod called for the death of all the baby boys in Bethlehem under two years of age. He was the perfect pawn for the job, and Satan undoubtedly used him.

This child, however, would live. Having been warned in a dream to flee, Joseph and Mary headed for Egypt. When the evil ruler finally died, they returned to Israel, but withdrew to a district in Galilee, since Archelaus, another dangerous figure, was governing the land of Judea (Matthew 2:19-23).

Confrontation

It shouldn’t come as a surprise, given the absolute fixation Satan would have had on this very special man, that immediately following Jesus’ baptism, when the heavens were opened and the Father spoke those astonishing words, “This is my Son, whom I

love, with him I am well pleased,” that Satan sought Jesus out personally.

If there was any doubt as to Jesus’ true identity, it was completely erased at His baptism. The words “This is my Son,” spoke not only of Jesus’ relationship to the Father, but it harkened back to the Davidic covenant and Psalm 2. The statement “You are my Son, today I have begotten you,” is formulaic in Scripture, expressing the installment of a king. It is enthronement language.¹⁵³ In this respect, Jesus’ baptism was not only performed to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15), but it marked the beginning of His public ministry. Just as David was anointed as king and given the Holy Spirit for empowerment, so to, the greater David began His ministry marked out as the King of kings, walking in the power of the Spirit, ushering in the kingdom of God.¹⁵⁴ Truly this descendant of David was the one ultimately envisioned in Genesis 3:15. And Satan knew it.

¹⁵³ See Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5, 5:5, as well as Dr. Carson’s excellent J.B. Gay Lectures, “Hard Texts: Why Does Hebrews Cite the OT Like That?”. Find it online at: http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Audio-and-Multimedia/Speakers-Lectures-and-Sermons/DA-Carson/The-Use-of-OT-in-the-NT/

¹⁵⁴ Here it is worth noting, as an aside, the literary structure of Matthew’s Gospel. Writing to a predominately Jewish audience, he carefully, and subtly, shows how Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s patterns laid down in the OT, and especially how Jesus is the greater Moses. Consider only the first few chapters. The infancies of both Jesus and Moses were threatened by evil rulers: Pharaoh sought to destroy all the Hebrew boys, as did Herod. When Jesus fled to Egypt, remaining there until the death of Herod, Matthew points out that this fulfilled the prophetic statement, “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Matthew 2:15). Here the history of Israel is recapitulated in the life of Christ, who is the true Israel of God. Just as Israel wandered in the wilderness and was tested, Jesus is led into the wilderness and is tested (Matthew 4:1-11). Israel remained in the wilderness for forty years; Jesus fasted for forty days (Matthew 4:2). Moses ascended a mountain to receive the words of God; Jesus stands on the side of a mountain and teaches the people God’s law (Matthew 5:1ff). Not surprisingly, Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17).

It isn't surprising, therefore, to read of the Spirit leading Jesus out into the desert "to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). A confrontation was inevitable. Neither is it a coincidence that Satan began his assault by jabbing a finger at Jesus' status, saying, "If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4:3, 6). The perpetual drip of Satan's temptations pressed on His unique position. "If you are..."

The conflict in the wilderness marked a crucial turning point. Unlike the first Adam who fell prey to the Serpent's subtleties (as did the nation of Israel who functioned as a kind of corporate Adam), the second Adam, Jesus Christ, remained faithful. Unlike Adam who failed to fully trust in the authority of God's Word, Christ as the very Word (John 1:1) parried Satan's temptations through Scriptural resolve. Unlike Israel who continually grumbled and sinned in the face of testing, Jesus as the true Israel relied on His Father to carry him through.¹⁵⁵ He was the greater Joshua, conquering not merely the enemy's outpost, but the very enemy himself. As the divine warrior, He didn't set his eyes on that small plot of land nestled in the Middle East. Rather, He purposed to recapture that which the Promised Land pictured, and that which the Garden was supposed to envelope, the very earth itself. Such is the significance of this encounter.

Kingdom Power

When Christ emerged resilient, the occasion marked the definitive inbreaking of the Kingdom of God; an inbreaking of unimpeachable power destined to dispel demons, heal the sick, set captives free, and dispense gifts. It began with the command, "Be gone, Satan!" (Matthew 4:10). And when Satan was forced to retreat, the kingdom of darkness no doubt shuddered.

Immediately following this encounter, it isn't surprising to hear Jesus saying, "'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is

¹⁵⁵ Jesus' quoting exclusively from Deuteronomy isn't coincidental either. A parallel was being established with the wilderness travels of Israel.

at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Or, as Matthew reports, “And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them” (Matthew 4:23-24, see also Luke 4:14).

In the history of theological discourse, the Kingdom of God has been a notoriously challenging concept to define. But if anything was evident to the demonic strongholds scattered throughout Israel, it was that they stood powerless in the face of its advance. They didn’t need a theologian to tell them that the Kingdom surged with power. On more than one occasion insight into their disquieted fears is gained. In the city of Galilee, when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, he ran into a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon. Upon seeing Jesus, he cried out in a loud voice, “Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God” (Luke 4:34). Later that evening, when Jesus was healing the sick, it reads, “And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that He was the Christ” (Luke 4:41).

Their fears were soon multiplied when Jesus appointed seventy-two of His followers to go out into the neighboring districts to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. Upon returning, they exclaim with joy and astonishment, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name” (Luke 10:17)! At this, Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (vs. 18). The statement is bit perplexing, but given the disciples having received authority from Christ to overcome the power of the enemy (vs. 19), it appears that Jesus was saying something like: “While you were expelling the subordinates [the demons] I beheld the master [Satan] falling.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ An adaptation of Godet found in William Hendriksen’s *New Testament Commentary* on Luke (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1978), 581.

What a frenzied state the kingdom of darkness must have been thrown into! What must the demons have thought when Jesus continued to speak of His mission in terms of overthrowing Satan?

In the eleventh chapter of Luke, while refuting the spurious claim that He was casting out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, Jesus described the assault on darkness in terms of binding and plundering a strong man. He said, “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil” (Luke 11:21-22). The strong man is none other than Satan himself. Here Jesus asserts with remarkable clarity His intention to rip off the Enemy’s armor, overcome him and divide the spoils. These and other such statements (John 12:31-32, 16:11) remind us that “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8b). The spiritual enemies of God knew it. And trembled!

An Enemy Continues to Plot

None of this served to ultimately dampen Satan’s ambitions, however, causing him to lay down his arms in surrender. In fact, after his defeat in the wilderness, Luke informs us that “when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). While Christ’s victory in the wilderness was a genuine triumph, it didn’t spell the end of Satan. He was still on the move, plotting and scheming, looking for another opportunity to derail the Messiah. Not only did he continue to believe in the power of sin and autonomy, trusting that the purposes of God could be thwarted, but the vulnerable frame of the Messiah presented him with some interesting options. Jesus was a man like any other man, save the sinful nature. He grew tired like other men, required food, felt pain, and most importantly of all, his heart pumped blood like the hearts of other men. And if it pumped blood, it could be made to stop pumping blood. He could die.

The Enemy's options were, therefore, numerous. If he could get the Messiah to sin, the war would be over. If he could disrupt the plans of God, the tide might turn in his favor. Or if he could kill the Messiah, the strength of his arm would be displayed. Countless thousands of angelic onlookers were watching, after all. The life of Christ played like a stadium event, as all of history pointed to this moment. For those angels who longed to look into these very things, their necks craned hard to see what would happen next. It was like the Garden all over again, except that the stakes were now much higher. This was the second Adam, God the Son in the flesh (John 1:1-14).

One must be careful not to overly emphasize Satan's influence in the Gospel accounts, to see demons hiding behind every bush, as if the people were merely puppets under their control. But neither should it be thought that Satan wasn't active, stirring up hatred and dissension, enticing unbelievers to lash out in violence. Judas won't allow one the luxury of thinking that men are perfectly insulated from his suggestions. The challenge is properly assessing, without indulging in excess or fancy, the various instances of murderous intent littering the Gospel narratives. What is one to make, for example, of the people of Nazareth who drove Jesus out of their town to the lip of a cliff, seeking to throw Him off (Luke 4:28-30)? Did Satan play a role in their extreme hatred? Was this Luke's way of illustrating an example of Satan's seeking another opportunity (4:13)? It is hard, if not impossible to say. If one were inclined only toward making conservative judgments, it would seem that Satan largely sought to kill the Messiah through the scribes and the Pharisees, Judas, and the governmental powers of ungodly Rome.

John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7). Later Jesus said the same (Matthew 12:34, 23:33). It would require a work of considerable effort not to think of these Jewish leaders as belonging to the devil (Gen 3:15). From the beginning of Christ's public ministry until the bitter end, they opposed the Lord's teachings and continually looked for opportunities to arrest or kill Him (Luke

5:21, 30; 6:2, 6, 11; 11:15-16, 53-54; 20:19; John 5:16, 7:1, 6-8, 30, 32; 8:59, 10:39; 11:53).

Perhaps the most striking moment of convergence between the plans of Satan and their own evil desires occurred when Judas approached them with plans of betrayal. Luke reports that “Satan entered Judas” (Luke 22:3, see also John 13:27) when the “chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus” (Luke 22:2, NIV). When Judas whispered words of treachery, it says that “they were glad, and agreed to give him money” (Luke 22:5). Such cruel delight wasn’t happenstance. Satan was orchestrating their emotions.

But Did He Understand God’s Plan?

But why would Satan plot the death of Christ? Didn’t he know that the cross was going to defeat him? Didn’t he hear Jesus tell His disciples “that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31-32; Luke 18:31)? It’s hard to imagine Jesus predicting His death more plainly. And what about that little word “must?” Jesus taught them that the Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be killed. He *must* be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes. He *must* rise again. Surely Satan recognized that this was God’s plan. Surely the OT types and shadows pointing to Christ’s redeeming work filled his soul with sudden grief, coming now into greater focus and purpose.

There are those who answer such questions in the affirmative, arguing that Satan did in fact understand, or came to understand the place of the cross in the purposes of God, well before Christ’s death. As will be shown shortly, this answer, as well as the converse, subtly impacts one’s view of the triumph and atonement of Christ.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ If one were inclined to think of the atonement more in terms of paying a price to Satan (the Ransom theory), for example, then it would be rather odd

We'll begin with the view of Pastor John Piper. He argues that Satan did understand Jesus' mission and states the matter like this,

“Why would Satan do this [seek to kill the Messiah]? Doesn't he know this is suicide? Doesn't he know that he's going to be undone; that he's going to be destroyed? The cross and the resurrection are the breaking of the back of Satan; they're the defanging of Satan; they are the decisive battle that enables him to be thrown into the lake of fire. Doesn't he know this?

I think he knew it.”¹⁵⁸

Two reasons are given for thinking this is so, and both center on the strategic approach of Satan. He first points to the wilderness temptations and notes how Satan tempts the Messiah to preserve His life. Turn these stones into bread. Eat and live. Use your powers to escape hunger. Throw yourself off the temple and angels will catch you. Show your power and people will follow you. Piper says, “Interpretation: [Satan is thinking] ‘Whatever you do don't die! Whatever you do don't suffer! Whatever you do don't use your power to lay your life down.’ That's the way Satan began to work.”¹⁵⁹ Piper then notes one other important clue. It's found in Mark 8:31-33. This is where Peter rebukes Jesus for saying that

for Satan not to possess some definite understanding of Jesus' atoning mission. Conversely, if Satan didn't correctly perceive the mission, then it would undermine the Ransom theory as a viable, biblical position. Having said this, see Gregory of Nyssa's twenty-fifth catechism question. While holding to a Ransom theory of the atonement, he nevertheless taught that Satan was deceived, not perceiving the divine nature in Christ. When Satan swallowed Christ in the flesh, he also swallowed Christ's divine nature, which choked him, as it were.

¹⁵⁸ John Piper, *Judas Iscariot, the Suicide of Satan, and the Salvation of the World*, 2007. Find it online at: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/judas-iscariot-the-suicide-of-satan-and-the-salvation-of-the-world>

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

He must suffer and die. Upon hearing this, Jesus turns and says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!” Why say that to Peter? Here it is argued that Satan, seeing where all this suffering is heading, tries to deter the Messiah. He tries to keep Him from choosing death, using Peter’s aversion as a fitting tool for temptation. Satan doesn’t want Jesus to die a sacrificial death.

So the question then becomes: Why did Satan later instigate the death of Jesus? Why enter Judas and facilitate the plan? Why commit suicide?

Piper explains,

“I conclude that Satan saw his efforts to divert Jesus from the cross failing. Over and over again Jesus sets His face like flint to die. No matter what Satan does Jesus is resolute, and there comes a point where he knows, ‘I can’t stop this.’ Now what would you do if you were the arch evil person and your first strategy aborts? Here’s what I would do... I’d try to make it as bad as possible... He [Satan] wanted all the disciples scattered, and he wanted the lashes to be as hard as they could be, and the nails to be as rusty as they could be, and the death to be as slow as it could be. If he can’t stop it, he’ll make it horrible: emotionally horrible, relationally horrible, physically horrible.

I think that probably is what happened.”¹⁶⁰

The crucial passage in all this is Mark 8:31-33, and here various commentators agree that Satan was behind Peter’s words. William Hendriksen writes, “In speaking to Peter, Jesus is actually addressing Satan; or, if one prefers, is addressing whatever in Peter has been perversely influenced by the prince of evil.”¹⁶¹ William L. Lane is a bit more cautious, writing, “The suggestion that he should

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. For a similar perspective, see Sinclair Ferguson’s profoundly helpful lecture *Christus Victor*, found online at: <http://media1.wts.edu/media/audio/insf01-copyright.mp3>.

¹⁶¹ William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary* on Mark (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1978), 328.

refuse the passion may be construed as a temptation coming from Satan himself who desires to thwart the divine plan of salvation.”¹⁶²

In order to further sharpen the view, a couple other points might be considered. First, it is worth noting that Peter is said to have rebuked (*epitimaō*) Jesus. This is fairly strong language. In fact, certain sectors of the early church found the statement a bit embarrassing and attempted to soften Peter’s words. One manuscript trail reads, “But Simon Peter, in order to spare him, spoke to him.”¹⁶³ The word doesn’t mean that of course. It means, in this context, to censure or admonish, to charge sharply. One cannot help but wonder if Satan’s influence wouldn’t callous Peter’s words.

Secondly, this position might add depth to the sneers of those who mocked Jesus while He hung on the cross. Luke writes, “And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One’” (Luke 23:35)! The soldiers likewise said, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself” (Luke 23:37)! Could it be that Satan was using the taunts of these people to tempt Christ to shed the shame of the cross and show them His power?

Another Perspective

While there is much to commend this perspective, the weight of the evidence points another direction. While I cannot say (nor want to say too strongly) that it necessarily undermines the triumphant nature of the cross, it would seem that if Satan knew what he was doing when he helped perpetrate the death of Jesus—that he did in fact know he was committing spiritual suicide—then the triumph of the cross wouldn’t have had the same surprising punch. There wouldn’t have been as poignant a realization of the utter folly of his evil plans had he known what Good Friday

¹⁶² William Lane, *NICNT*, Mark (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 304.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 295, footnote 76.

entailed. The “Oh no!” moment would have occurred well before the cross, thereby removing something of the climax.¹⁶⁴ These larger contextual concerns will hopefully become more apparent at the end of this chapter. Until then, the argument advanced here is that the cross and its implications were largely hidden from Satan for the following reasons:

(1) Mark 8:31-33 can be understood in a different light. The words, “Get behind me, Satan,” could very well be a manner of speaking and not a literal address to Satan. Since Jesus goes on to say, “You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man,” it would seem that Peter was being told that his outlook was worldly in nature and unwittingly demonic. Opposition to Jesus’ mission, which necessarily included suffering and death, would resonate with the kingdom of darkness, not the kingdom of light. Calvin appears to agree when he writes,

“[When Jesus says, “Get thee behind me, Satan,”] Christ therefore throws his disciple to a distance from him, because, in his inconsiderate zeal, he acted the part of Satan; for he does not simply call him adversary, but gives him the name of the devil, as an expression of the greatest abhorrence.”¹⁶⁵

While this understanding alleviates some of the pressure, it doesn’t entirely resolve the issue. If verse 31 didn’t sufficiently pique Satan’s interest, Jesus’ sharp rebuke certainly would. By highlighting the satanic nature of Peter’s outlook, the divine purpose of Christ having to suffer and die was underscored, being highlighted, as it were, with a fluorescent marker! Jesus’ rebuke would have communicated, in effect: “Do you really want to know what must not happen, Satan? Don’t kill the Messiah! That would

¹⁶⁴ I say this with all reverence. God forbid that I speak ill of His greatest work, suggesting that the cross was anything but climactic. If I am wrong, I am quite sure that the truth far exceeds my simplistic imaginations.

¹⁶⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, cited online from Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/>

align perfectly with your intentions.” To reiterate, it doesn’t appear that Satan influenced Peter, hoping to keep the Messiah from embracing death. Nevertheless, it does appear that Satan understood that Jesus *must* suffer and die and rise again.

So is the issue as broad as it is long? Did Satan work to keep Christ away from the cross after learning this fact?

Not necessarily so. Here is why.

(2) When Jesus said that He must “rise again” (Matthew 20:17-19; Mark 9:31, 10:34, Luke 18:33, Luke 24:7, 24:46), the Scriptures report that the disciples didn’t fully comprehend His meaning (Luke 18:34). Whether the demonic realm experienced the same spiritual torpor is impossible to say. But suppose they did understand the phrase “rise again” to mean physical resurrection. Others had been raised from the dead during the ministry of Jesus. Lazarus is one such example. Interestingly, at a later point in the narrative, after Lazarus had been granted life, it says that when Jesus was in Bethany, a large crowd of Jews came to see Him, and “not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead” (John 12:9). Immediately after this, John reports, “So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus” (John 12:10-11). If Satan knew that Jesus intended to rise from the dead, it doesn’t follow that he thought of it as his defeat. If the Messiah could die once, he could die twice. With the scribes and Pharisees fully set against Jesus, a stock resurrection wouldn’t change their hearts. Lazarus’ didn’t. Besides, Jesus taught as much in the parable of the rich man (Luke 16:31). In all likelihood, Satan probably didn’t feel overly threatened by these words. All the right players, it seemed to him, were on his side.

(3) There was also the matter of Jesus’ going away. On more than one occasion He spoke as follows, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to Him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come” (John 7:33b-34). It is hard to say how Satan understood these words, but it would seem evident that Jesus, after His death, was

going back to the Father who sent Him. This could be construed as an innocuous, even advantageous outcome. Jesus was going to leave.

(4) Moreover, Satan knew that Jesus was going to leave for a significant period of time. Various parables taught as much (Luke 19:11ff; Matthew 21:33ff, 22:1ff, 25:14ff). Part of this expanse of time would include, much to Satan's glee, no doubt, death and wars and tribulation and earthquakes and all other manner of sinful groanings (Matthew 24:1-51). If Satan thought of Jesus' resurrection in terms of showing another miracle- the rising of the Son of Man- with sin and death still occurring on the other side, as well as Jesus leaving the earthly scene, he probably thought this could be navigated with relative ease. It's true that there were numerous statements suggesting his defeat (John 12:31, 16:11), but those, like Genesis 3:15, could be swept under the rug of self-confidence.

(5) In the same vein of self-confidence, Satan's pride twisted mind probably viewed Jesus' predictions of His death and resurrection, as well as His resolve to embrace death, as reactions or adjustments to the apparent inevitability of his power. Jesus had been (seemingly) forced to move about in a covert fashion, for example, so as to avoid coming into contact with hostile Jews (John 7:1, 10; 11:54). Such sneaking about probably bolstered Satan's lofty estimations of himself. Here it must be remembered as well that Satan didn't have John's footnotes telling him that Jesus' hour was not yet come (John 7:30; 8:20¹⁶⁶), which is to say that Satan didn't know that God was actually orchestrating all of these events, having set an exact hour when Satan's leash would be considerably slackened for the purpose of afflicting Christ.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Although John 7:6-8 might have tipped him. But even here Satan could have construed the words to mean that Jesus was anticipating the inevitable, which involved a mixture of divine plan/reaction and satanic scheming.

¹⁶⁷ One could carry on this conversation long into the night, pointing to this or that verse in the Gospels and asking how it may or may not have been understood by Satan. At the end of the day, it would seem that there was enough evidence for Satan to know, but also enough potentially perplexing information to throw him off the scent.

(6) Even if we grant that Satan grasped the cross and a number of its theological implications, we must not underestimate the blinding effects of sin and pride. Why is it that communists continue to think that if they could just change one little detail here or there, or if they were the ones to lead the socialist empire, that the outcome would be gloriously different? Sin blinds the mind. Moreover, it is hard to calculate the degree of hatred swirling in the heart of the devil. Pure evil knows no bounds. It is an uncontrollable, warping thing. Here the monomaniacal passion of Captain Ahab is instructive. Having lost his leg to the white whale, the singularly fixed captain cannot rest until his adversary is slayed. In one of the more stirring moments of *Moby Dick*, while working his crew into a frenzy, purposing to recruit the odd mix of sailors unto his cause, Captain Ahab unlocks the gates of his heart and reveals something of the unearthly obsession gripping him. He says,

“It was Moby Dick that dismasted me; Moby Dick that brought me to this dead stump I stand on now. Aye, aye,” he shouted with a terrific, loud, animal sob, like that of a heart-stricken moose; “Aye, ay! it was that accursed white whale that razeed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me forever and a day!” Then tossing both arms, with measureless imprecations he shouted out: “Aye, ay! and I’ll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition’s flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (Pleasantville: The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., 1989), 155. It is worth noting that a good case can be made for viewing the White Whale as God in this epic. “In this interpretation,” writes R.C. Sproul, “Ahab’s pursuit of the whale is not a righteous pursuit of God but natural man’s futile attempt in his hatred of God to destroy the omnipotent deity.” See his intriguing article, *The Unholy Pursuit of God in Moby Dick*, found online at: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/unholy-pursuit-god-moby-dick/>

For the heart that is driven to near insanity, or beyond insanity, hating God more than anything else, the opportunity to make the Son bleed and scream would prove well nigh irresistible. No other pleasure could equal it. And when there is no room in such a heart for compassion or tenderness, let alone love, the options, while varied in their potential execution, are essentially one: If the Christ won't sin, then He must be killed. In this, Piper's perspective is quite right. One would just want to stress the blinding effects of rage in combination with the satanic impulse to oppose anything divine, understood or not. To whatever degree Satan comprehended the plan of the cross, it would appear to be a schizophrenic understanding, a tumult of pride, suspicion, and blind hatred.

(7) Lastly, one must also remember what has already been explored in an earlier chapter concerning the mystery and hiddenness of the Gospel. If Edwards is correct, and there seems to be good warrant for thinking so, then the question is largely moot. The battle plans of the atonement were certainly foreshadowed, but wrapped in mystery.¹⁶⁹

The Heel of the Cross

We come now, finally, to the question of the cross and the power of God: How did the crucifixion of the Son of God ultimately defeat the Serpent? In previous chapters we explored the principle powers of the kingdom of darkness as well as God's initial dealings with them. We noted that the powers of darkness resided chiefly in:

¹⁶⁹ Commenting on Colossians 2:15, F.F. Bruce says, "Had they [the spiritual hostile forces] but realized the truth, those 'archons of this age'- had they (as Paul puts it in another epistle) known the hidden wisdom of God which decreed the glory of Christ and His people- 'they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor 2:8)" *NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 240

- The power of autonomy
- The power of sin/evil
- The power of death
- The power of enslavement

We also noted how God's micro-crushings scattered throughout the OT strongly suggest that the final blow of Genesis 3:15 will:

- Involve an ironic reversal whereby the schemes of the wicked one are turned against him.
- Mock and humiliate the Serpent.
- Be violent.
- Be just.
- Be divinely powerful.
- Be mediated through human weakness and suffering.
- Serve to more greatly elevate God's fame and glory.

When these concepts are laced together and examined in the light of the NT, all of the aforementioned micro-crushings converge on one man, being ultimately fulfilled and heightened in Jesus Christ who directly counterpoints each of Satan's so-called strengths. Christ overcomes Satan through weakness; He defeats death by dying; He turns autonomy on its head by using it for unimaginable good; He breaks the power of sin through grace; conquers evil with love; and He frees His people from the bitter enslavements of sin and condemnation.

The sum total of all that could be said about the wonders of the cross can scarcely be reduced to a few bullets. It will take an eternity of time to fully digest its significance. Even now the human mind is pressed to its utter most limits and stands in need of grace to illumine the depths of Christ's love (Eph 3:14-21). The purpose, therefore, will be to expand upon those areas that directly and most clearly contradict the powers of darkness. In so doing, we will not only be interested in glorying in God's power, but in defending the

thesis of this book, which aims to uncover the concept dubbed Satan's awful idea.

One more word by way of reminder. In an earlier chapter, we talked about working backwards from the data, like a detective investigating a crime scene. In the present context, the approach will more closely resemble that of a man examining the stratagems of two generals fighting on the battlefield. The observer possesses a tremendous amount of material detailing their bloody engagements, but does not know what ultimately precipitated the disagreement. Desiring to ascertain the root cause, might the inquisitive soul be able to discern through the peculiarities of the conflict (the strategies employed, the tone and style of their correspondences, the weapons utilized) something of its origin? By now it should be evident that much can be gleaned through this approach. Christ's peculiar exercise of power speaks volumes about Satan's awful idea, even the origin of the dispute.¹⁷⁰

Point One: The Joseph Principle

It was a prayer that spoke of power.

Raising their voices to God, the "Sovereign Lord," as they addressed Him in this prayer (Acts 4:24), John and Peter, along with those who were with them, petitioned God for courage and kingdom power. "Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness," they asked (vs. 29b NIV). And "stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (vs. 30 NIV).

¹⁷⁰ George Ladd, in a section detailing the triumphant nature of Christ's atonement, said this, "In some unexplained way, the death of Christ constituted an initial defeat of these [evil] powers" *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 476. Even if you cannot buy into the exact details of this work, this "unexplained way" is, I believe, quite discernable and can be uncovered through a consideration of the forthcoming truths.

What allowed them to pray with such boldness and for such boldness? Here one could point back to when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8) and witnessed the power of the Gospel in the conversion of the crowds (vs. 4). Or one might turn to that occasion when they confounded the Sanhedrin with a miracle that couldn't be denied (vs. 14). While these and many other factors could be cited by way of reply, each fails to uncover the root cause. The granite foundation from which such courage sprang certainly flowed from the empowering presence of the Spirit, but that only because of a prior historical reality. Turning to the beginning of the account, it reports that the apostles "were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). The resurrection, which ultimately led to the outpouring of the Spirit, explains their boldness.

Yet even here one must take another step back. It wasn't just a happenchance resurrection, but it was a carefully planned resurrection. In the middle of their prayer, directly preceding their request for boldness and power, they utter these crucial words, "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen" (Acts 4:27-28 NIV).

Theirs was a boldness rooted in the victory of the cross, a death and resurrection that didn't simply make the best of a series of uncontrollable events, but a death and resurrection stemming from the very plans of God. As Peter said in another place, it all happened "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). This was the work of the Sovereign Lord, the One who works out all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11). This explained their exuberant confidence. Their outlook had been soaked in the deep water of God's sovereignty.

Part of the glory and genius of the cross resides in the Lord's sovereign governance, for it was at the cross where Satan's autonomy was turned chiefly against him. The very acts which were meant to usurp God's designs, were in fact part of God's design, having been foreordained before the foundation of the world to

defeat the Serpent. How great the embarrassment and abasement of Satan! This is exactly like Haman's gallows. God took the very thing Satan most prized, his cherished power of autonomy, and hung him with it.

F.F. Bruce describes this ironic reversal with poetic flare when he writes,

“The very instrument of disgrace and death, by which the hostile forces thought they had Him in their grasp and had conquered Him forever was turned by Him into the instrument of their defeat and captivity. As He was suspended there, bound hand and foot to the wood in apparent weakness, they imagined they had Him at their mercy, and flung themselves upon Him with hostile intent. But, far from suffering their assault without resistance, He grappled with them and mastered them, stripping them of all their armour in which they trusted, and held them aloft in His mighty, outstretched hands, displaying to the universe their helplessness and His own unvanquished strength.”¹⁷¹

There can be no demonic retort to this. According to both Acts 2:23 and 4:27, wicked men played a vital role in the crucifixion of the Son of God. Their evil acts, spurred on by Satan, functioned as the divine means. Autonomy, that power which boasts of divine independence- that ability to step outside the will of God and create a reality of one's own making- was shown to be completely and utterly impotent. Goliath's head was chopped off with his own sword.

This is the Joseph principle, a truth encapsulated in the well known words, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen 50:20).

Point Two: The Power of Weakness

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 239-40.

“Earthly kings and princes,” writes Edwards, “when they are about to engage in any great and difficult work, will put on their strength, and will appear in all their majesty and power, that they may be successful. But when Christ was about to perform the great work of redeeming a lost world, the wisdom of God took an opposite method, and determined that he should be humbled and abased to a mean state, and appear in low circumstances.”¹⁷²

The Christmas carol composed by Carol Owens underscores this same truth. After asking the question, “How should a king come?” the melodic voices of men and women answer as follows:

“Even a child knows the answer of course,
In a coach of gold with a pure white horse.
In the beautiful city in the prime of the day,
And the trumpets should cry and the crowds make way.
And the flags fly high in the morning sun,
And the people all cheer for the sovereign one.
And everyone knows that's the way that it's done.
That's the way that a King should come.”

With repeated emphasis, the earthly pomp of kings is stressed. But near the end of the song, the Gospel emerges. After again asking the question, “How should a king come?” the following comes by way of reply,

“On a star filled night into Bethlehem,
Rode a weary woman and a worried man.
And the only sound in the cobblestone street,
Was the shuffle and the ring of their donkey's feet.
And a King lay hid in a virgin's womb,
And there were no crowds to see Him come.
At last in a barn in a manger of hay,
He came and God incarnate lay.”

¹⁷² Jonathan Edwards, *Wisdom Displayed in Salvation* (Peabody: Hendricksen Publishing, volume 2), page 150.

With the incarnation of the Son of God, we behold the most amazing interplay between divine power and human weakness. All throughout the OT, God used humble and fragile means to accomplish His purposes. With the coming of Christ, this is no less the case. The King of kings was born in a barn. His mother was a young peasant. Lowly shepherds hailed His arrival. There were no trumpet blasts in the street, no banners, and the only crown that would ever be placed on His head during His earthly ministry would be a crown of thorns.

This would be the perfect way to destroy a proud enemy.

In terms of military strategy, the Lord of Hosts had established a pattern of confronting the kingdom of darkness with violent force. Sometimes this came in the form of mighty plagues, sometimes with the edge of the sword, and sometimes an angel of death took the lives of thousands. This was justice channeled through judgment, and it was right and good. But when Christ was born, the long standing pattern was strategically reversed, and Satan's expectations were thrown off balance. Weakness would be Christ's strength, meekness His weapon of choice. As Isaiah said, "He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice" (Isaiah 42:2-3).

Here it must be asked why the cross was chosen as the means by which the propitiatory sacrifice would come. Hebrews teaches that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Heb 9:22). Why didn't Christ stand on the edge of a high cliff, bear the sins of the world, and jump off to His death? That would have resulted in death. That would have shed His blood. So why choose the ignominy and torture of the cross?

Here one must remember the words of Paul to the Corinthians, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor 1:25). By taking up His cross, it was as if Christ was saying, "I can beat you through sheer strength, as you well know, but I can also beat you through abject

weakness.” What more can be said about Christ’s strength, if His very weakness can overcome all the powers of hell? What does that say to Satan? What does that say to all the watching angels?

When the mob of soldiers and chief priest came to steal Jesus away in the night, Jesus spoke these startling words, “When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). All throughout Christ’s ministry, Satan’s leash had been fixed to some definite degree. But when the time came for the Son of Man to be lifted up, all hell broke loose. The Serpent was unleashed, and the demons that had been made to flee, being rebuked and cast out, were now permitted to pounce on Christ. They ripped into Him mercilessly, using the cruelest, most excruciating form of torture available in the ancient world. In all this, Christ allowed Himself to be swallowed by evil. Jumping off a cliff simply wouldn’t have produced the same results. Evil wouldn’t have been combated in the same way. In order to defeat evil in the most humiliating fashion, Christ had to triumph over evil by suffering humiliation. Edwards is very helpful here:

“Consider the weak and seemingly despicable means and weapons that God employs to overthrow Satan. Christ poured the greater contempt upon Satan in the victory that he obtained over him, by reason of the means of his preparing himself for it, and the weapons he has used. Christ chooses to encounter Satan in the human nature, in a poor, frail, afflicted state. He did as David did. David when going against the Philistine refused Saul’s armor, a helmet of brass, a coat of mail, and his sword. No, he puts them all off. Goliath comes mightily armed against David, with a helmet of brass upon his head, a coat of mail weighing five thousand shekels of brass, greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders, a spear, whose staff was like a weaver’s beam, and the spear’s head weighing six hundred shekels of iron. And besides all this, he had one bearing a shield before him. But David takes nothing but a staff in his hand, and a shepherd’s bag and a sling, and he goes against

the Philistine. So the weapons that Christ made use of were his poverty, afflictions and reproaches, sufferings and death. His principal weapon was his cross, the instrument of his own reproachful death. These were seemingly weak and despicable instruments to wield against such a giant as Satan. And doubtless the devil disdained them as much as Goliath did David's staves and sling. But with such weapons as these has Christ in a human, weak, mortal nature overthrown and baffled all the craft of hell. Such disgrace and contempt has Christ poured upon Satan."¹⁷³

Shortly afterwards he adds, "God shows his great and infinite wisdom in taking this method, to confound the wisdom and subtlety of his enemies. He hereby shows how easily he can do it, and that he is infinitely wiser than they."¹⁷⁴

It is this perspective that adds layers of depth to the mockings and beatings of Jesus. While hanging on the cross, exposed before the watching world, the rulers sneered at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the chosen One" (Luke 23:35b NIV; Mark 15:31-32). The soldiers likewise mocked Him, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself" (vs. 37). Little did they perceive the irony of their words, for in remaining fixed to the cross, Jesus was at that moment fulfilling His role of Savior, providing the very means of salvation they so desperately needed. But perhaps the greatest irony is seen in the fact that when the soldiers were beating him and spitting on Him, wrapping a purple cloak around Him (Mark 15:16-20) and saying, "Hail, king of the Jews," Christ was in fact securing a victory that would mock and overthrow the powers of darkness. With each slap, Christ was silently laying the foundation of their humiliation.

Such is the irony of the cross.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Ibid. 152.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 152.

¹⁷⁵ Here D.A. Carson's excellent message comes highly recommended, "The Irony of the Cross," where this theme is explored in stirring detail. It can be found online at: <http://soundofdoctrine.wordpress.com/2010/05/22/the-ironies-of-the-cross-%E2%80%93-d-a-carson/>

This thought is aptly brought to a close by considering a vision of John in the fifth chapter of Revelation. There we are told about a scroll with writing on both sides, sealed with seven seals. It is a scroll of judgment. When a mighty angel proclaims in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" John reports that no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth could open the scroll and look inside it. When he began to weep, knowing that if the scroll remained shut, men would have no hope, an elder said, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals" (Rev 5:5). Interestingly, the very next thing John sees is a Lamb, a Lamb that has been slain. The seeming disparity should be felt. The elder speaks of a conquering Lion, but when John looks he sees a slain Lamb. What manner of strength is this? Can a slain Lamb be compared to a Lion? The mixed metaphors perfectly collate in Christ Jesus, the One who conquered evil through sacrifice. He was the one "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

Point Three: The Burial of Death and the Breaking of Sin

It cannot be a coincidence that death, one of the sharpest swords in Satan's armory, was conquered by death (Heb 2:14). Here again the strength of Christ made manifest through the profoundest of means. Can a person descend any lower than the grave? Indeed, he cannot. So it is not without great irony that in dying, Christ dealt the crushing blow to Satan.

But in saying this, it must be asked how such a death defeated him. What did it do? How did it overthrow Satan? In one sense, even a bare death, that is, a death without an overflow of redemptive blessings, would convict the devil of a heinous crime. For in killing Jesus Christ, the one man in all the world who shouldn't have died, indeed, the most innocent man to ever walk the earth, Satan sealed his condemnation, showing how greatly he deserved to be condemned and punished (John 12:31, 16:11). A just man should not be unjustly tried nor unjustly put to death, and to do so is intolerably wicked. So when the infinite dignity of Christ, who is both perfect God and sinless man, is besmirched, the degree of retribution becomes incalculable. As the writer of Hebrews intimates, "How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:29)?

Thankfully, His was not a normal death, but a fountain of spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3). In terms of explicit references explaining how Christ's death fatally struck the kingdom of darkness, Colossians 2:13-15 ranks among the top. Hebrews 2:14 and 1 John 3:8 are tremendously significant as well. Interestingly, all three share a common thread: the forgiveness of sins. The context surrounding Hebrews 2:14 (see verse 9) points to suffering (vs. 10), to Christ's role as high priest, and specifically, His making "propitiation for the sins of the people" (vs. 17). 1 John 3:8 certainly makes a general statement, but it's easy to link it with verse 5. There John says, "You know that He appeared to take away sins" (1 John 3:5a). If this is right, then three of the clearest references to the defeat of Satan, insofar as the cross work of Christ is concerned, center on sin and its having been canceled or satisfied. Here's how Colossians describes it:

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he

has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:13-15 NIV).

The connection between “canceling the charge of our legal indebtedness” and “disarming the powers and authorities” is evident.¹⁷⁶ By nailing sin to the cross, and by extension our guilt, the powers of darkness were not only defeated, but humiliated. The Greek term *thriambeuo* (“triumphing over”) envisions a Roman military procession celebrating the defeat of an enemy. Peter O’Brien argues that the term means “to enjoy a triumphal procession” or “celebrate a victory,” or even to “lead as a conquered enemy in a victory parade.”¹⁷⁷ Clearly, the power of sin is intimately related to the kingdom of darkness, so much so that if sin is vanquished, the kingdom necessarily topples. It is not hard to understand why. Sin is the means by which Satan is able to exercise dominion over men. It holds them in bondage and condemns them. Before Christ died to free men from the power and penalty of sin, it appeared to be ultimately untamable or irreversible, a disease that could be eradicated through the fires of judgment, but not cured. But herein lays the glory of the cross. When Christ became a man, sharing in flesh and blood, He offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice in behalf of humanity. He became a Federal Head (Romans 5:12-21) and redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal 3:13). He bore our sins in His body (1 Peter 2:24), and God made Him who knew no sin to be sin (2 Cor 5:21).

No mere man could atone for the sins of the world. Not only would such a person have to atone for his own sins, which he

¹⁷⁶ For a careful exposition of this passage, especially as it relates to the view of those who see Christ divesting Himself of the principalities and powers, a view somewhat common among the Greek fathers, see Peter O’Brien’s comments in the *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossian, Philemon* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), 126-127.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 128.

could not do (Heb 7:27), but his death wouldn't be able to purchase forgiveness for others. Only Christ could offer a vicarious and sinless sacrifice of infinite worth. In addition to that, only Christ could bear the weight of sin and emerge triumphant.

The atonement is a great and mysterious doctrine. If we think about sin being imputed to Christ, and if we think about His bearing the the full weight of the curse on behalf of His people, and His crying out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" we might wonder how it was that Christ could stand under such a burden. Why didn't the unholy weight of sin crush Him?

Theologians have long considered this awesome fact. But in many ways, studying the atonement is like peering into a perfectly cut gem. The inner chamber cascades into an infinite regress of refracting lenses, spiraling deeper and deeper into a boundless majesty of wonder. In the same way, the heavenly ledger recording the exchange of sin and righteousness, that place of balances where sin and holiness collide, is too lofty for us. Trying to understand the mechanics of the atonement in engineering terms would be akin to asking for a formulaic account of creation *ex nihilo*. All we know is that something unimaginably grand happened on the cross in the unseen world of Christ's being.¹⁷⁸ There sin came into contact with omnipotent waves of cleansing power, a holiness so pure and inexhaustible, a light so brilliant and effulgent, a torch so inextinguishable, and a love and grace so gloriously deep, that sin had to give way, crumbling into absolution.¹⁷⁹ In short, Christ

¹⁷⁸ Whether and to what extent the spiritual realm was able to perceive such mysterious churnings in the soul of Christ, one cannot say. Fancying a guess, it would seem that the angels and demons did see something more. Spiritual eyes better behold spiritual things. Think of the darkness that fell across the land while Christ hung on the cross. Think of how the earth shook and the rocks split, as Matthew records (27:51). If the physical realm couldn't refrain from responding to the awesome events occurring in the spiritual realm, what wonders behind the scene? Here, as an aside, it appears safe to say that the kingdom of darkness knew they were beat, and they knew it before the resurrection.

¹⁷⁹ Dabney writes, "If we are asked, how this could be, when Christ was not holden forever of death, and experienced none of the remorse, wicked despair,

condemned sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3). The proof is evidenced in the resurrection. Since death had been conquered, the grave couldn't hold Him. As Peter said on the day of Pentecost, "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24).

The undeniable truth is that grace is greater than sin. Love conquers evil. When Christ rose from the dead, the kingdom of darkness was broken.

Point Four: Vindicated

Lastly, there is the matter of God's vindication.

When a man criticizes and complains about a subject for a very long time, claiming to possess special insight into a matter and endeavors with great energy to prove his case, but is later shown to be woefully incorrect, he is made to look like a fool. His reputation is marred. He may sputter and back peddle with great emphasis, but sensible onlookers recognize the man's error for what it is and pay little attention to his excuses. The amount of time and energy dedicated to such criticisms, as well as the degree of passion employed, will inevitably heighten the embarrassment. In other words, if a man dedicates the entirety of his life to a subject, and argues vociferously against a certain view, his error will more greatly impugn his reputation.

In the case of Satan, he has argued with unparalleled passion against God's righteousness, urging that God unjustly overlooks sin.

and subjective pollution, attending a lost sinner's second death? We reply: the same penalty, when poured out on Him, could not work all the detailed results, because of His divine nature and immutable holiness. A stick of wood, and an ingot of gold are subjected to the same fire. The wood is permanently consumed: the gold is only melted, because it is a precious metal, incapable of natural oxidation, and it is gathered, undiminished, from the ashes of the furnace. But the fire was the same! And then, the infinite dignity of Christ's person gives to His temporal sufferings a moral value equal to the weight of all the guilt of the world," *Ibid.*, 505.

As far as time is concerned, his complaint has spanned the ages. Countless centuries have rolled by with him complaining in the background. So in terms of degree and duration, Satan's accusations against God and His people have been unequaled.

Consider the following by way of reminder. When King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and later learned that she was with child, he conspired to have Uriah killed, so as to preserve the secrecy of his sin. Naturally, none of this was hidden from God, so He sent Nathan the prophet to confront David. When David admitted to doing evil, various judgments were pronounced upon him and those involved. But strikingly, the following words are recorded, "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die'" (2 Sam 12:13). David was spared.

Can one even begin to imagine Satan's caustic accusations and cries of injustice? What would he have said when he heard these words from David, "He [God] does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10)? "Exactly!" Satan must have cried. "God isn't dealing with you as He should- as He must! He is no better than us!"

To Satan's absolute horror, the cross solved this apparent problem. According to Romans 3:24-26, in what Martin Lloyd Jones described as "the acropolis of the Bible," that Himalayan height where the grand resolution of forgiveness and righteousness intermingle, the world learns how this could be so. Paul says that believers are justified by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood. "This was to show," as Paul stresses, "God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:25-26).

Here Paul readily acknowledges the predicament of the OT. God's very righteousness was at stake. This is why the cross is so crucial. It shows God's righteousness at the present time, "so that He might *be* just." Don't miss that. The question isn't how God

could be righteous if He didn't forgive. Quite the opposite. The crucial issue for Paul was: How could God be righteous if He did forgive sins?

Leon Morris writes,

"Often and often people had sinned. You would expect that a just God would punish them. That is what justice means. Paul is arguing that sinners deserve to be punished for their sin. Sinners have gone on living, just as they were. Now you can argue that this shows God to be merciful, or compassionate, or kind, or forbearing, or loving. But you cannot argue that it shows him to be *just*. Whatever else the absence of punishment of sins shows, it does not show us justice."¹⁸⁰

With the cross we see how God can forgive sins, while also judging them. By presenting Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice, God provided a means whereby He could justly justify those who place their faith in Christ. Actually, it can be stated even more strongly. If God is going to be just, He must justify those who place their faith in Christ. Justice now demands it. This, it must be stressed, has made Satan's accusations of the brethren and blasphemies of God utterly baseless (Romans 8:33-39).

Songs of Praise

In light of Christ's matchless victory, is it any wonder that the angels, those holy creatures who have been watching the unfolding drama since the beginning, magnify God's power? All throughout the book of Revelation visions like the following are beheld,

¹⁸⁰ Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 195.

“Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped” (Rev 5:11-14; see also 4:11; 7:12; 11:17; 12:10; 19:1).

These are words to be proclaimed now. Christ has reversed the power of autonomy, turning it against Satan. Christ has shown the greatness of His strength by beating Satan through weakness. Christ has defeated death through death. Christ has broken the power of sin by allowing Himself to be broken. Christ has silenced the Serpent by demonstrating the righteousness of God.

The Lord has fulfilled His promise. He has crushed the Serpent’s head, and He did it in the most amazing and unexpected way. The Lord crushed Satan by crushing His Son.

Ironically, all of this serves to more greatly magnify God’s glory, the very thing Satan wanted to steal. As a result, we sing with the angels of God’s great power and say with all the faithful *Sola Potestas*. Power is found in Christ alone.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Stephen Charnock writes, “The arm of Power was lifted up as high as the designs of Wisdom were laid deep: as this way of redemption could not be contrived but by an Infinite Wisdom, so it could not be accomplished but by an Infinite Power. None but God could shape such a design, and none but God could effect it. The Divine Power in temporal deliverances, and freedom from the slavery of human oppressors, vails to that which glitters in redemption; whereby the devil is defeated in his designs, stripped of his spoils, and yoked in his strength,” *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996, volume 2), 59.

Chapter 10

-Glory and Shame-

We can sing the songs of victory, but we may not stop marching. The war isn't over yet.

In this last chapter, we want to look at that final aspect of Satan's awful idea, satanic glory, and consider how God continues to conquer and eradicate the kingdom of darkness. Attention will be especially paid to how God heaps ignominy, rather than glory, upon Satan, as well as the church's role in the continuing conflict. This will take us through the present age, "the last days," up until the coming of Christ and the consummation of this age when evil will be finally and completely extinguished.

Serpent Crushing, Redeemed Slaves

It's an easy verse to miss. Tucked away in the final chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, sandwiched between his personal greetings and doxological conclusion, the following words of promise emerge, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20a). It is an interesting statement, and not a little curious. The allusion is plain enough though. Paul is picking up the language of Genesis 3:15. But instead of referencing Christ, which one would expect, he instead says that Satan is going to be crushed under the feet of the Roman saints. Their heels will *suntribo* the Serpent, which is to say, trample him or break him into pieces. How can Paul say this? Didn't Christ crush the head of the Serpent?

Here an awesome truth emerges that sheds light on the mission of the church; a mission that corresponds with God's strategy of displaying His glory to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms; a mission that includes our stomping on the enemy. In order to get at this, the doctrinal mountain known as union with Christ needs to be ascended. Only there will the vantage point prove lofty enough to provide a proper perspective.

In Him

With praise soaked words, Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:3). One of the premier doctrines of the NT is the doctrine of the believer's union with Christ.¹⁸² This is that amazing truth of the our being so intimately related to Him, so bound up with Him, by grace through faith, according the powerful working of the Spirit, that our very identity melds into His (Rom 8:29). We can actually be said to be, as the NT so often asserts, "in Christ." This means, among many things, that the redemptive accomplishments of Christ become those of our own. We share in His benefits. This explains how a doctrine like justification functions. Christ's righteousness, by virtue of our union with Him, is imputed to us. We are reckoned as righteous, not because we are perfectly holy in our conduct, but because we are forgiven and hidden in Christ who is perfectly holy.

Amazingly, this union runs so deep that Christ's redemptive experiences become that of the Christians. In this vein, Hendriksen can even say, "that all of Christ's redemptive experiences are

¹⁸² Professor Murray boldly writes, "Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ." And again, "Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ." *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1955), 161.

duplicated unredemptively in the believer.”¹⁸³ He goes on to illustrate this by citing a number of examples. He writes,

“The Christian, accordingly, suffered with Christ (Rom 8:17), was crucified with him (Rom 6:6), died with him (Rom 6:8; 2 Tim 2:11), was buried with him (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12), made alive with him (Col 2:13), raised with him (Col 2:12; 3:1), made joint-heirs with him (Rom 8:17), is glorified with him (Rom 8:17), enthroned with him (Col 3:1; Rev 20:4), and reigns with him (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:4).”¹⁸⁴

If these wonderful truths are duplicated in the lives of the church, it isn’t difficult to see how Paul can say that God will crush Satan under the feet of the saints. Since Christ is *the* ultimate Serpent crusher, those who are united to Him share in this work of demolition. The church continues to trample the Serpent.¹⁸⁵

A Trampling Church

This is the mission of the church. It isn’t often thought of in these terms, but that’s really what evangelism and cross-cultural missions is all about- it is entering enemy territory in the power of the Spirit, with the Gospel on our lips, boldly looking to rescue

¹⁸³ *New Testament Commentary, Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 169.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 169

¹⁸⁵ Conversely, Christ continues to trample the Serpent, for, as Paul writes, “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). It might seem a bit odd for Paul to highlight the peacefulness of God in the context of smashing the enemy (Romans 16:20). Here our modern minds would do well to consider the fitting relationship between peace and justice or rest and the absence of evil (2 Sam 7:1ff). Because God is a God of peace, evil must be eradicated. There is, therefore, no necessary incongruity between the intent of peace and the engagement of just war.

souls. This is exactly how God defined the ministry of the greatest missionary of the early church. Speaking to Paul on the road to Damascus, the Lord told him,

“I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles--to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:16b-18).

Now that the power of sin has been broken, leaving Satan crippled and bound (Rev 20:2-3), the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is commissioned to go out in His name to all the corners of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20). We are to make disciples of all nations. People are to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, which is to say that God has laid claim on these individuals, transferring them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His Son (Col 1:13). He places His name on them, saying, as it were, “This one is mine.”

In this the second Adam is subduing the earth and “destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until he has put all His enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:24b-25; Heb 10:12-13). This is why the church’s evangelistic and apologetic task can be described in destructive terms. Paul writes,

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:3-5).

The church’s mission is rooted in Christ’s mission. It is a Psalm 2 type of mission. For in this section of Scripture, after

speaking of Christ's resurrection (vs. 6), the LORD tells the Son, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth" (vs. 8-10). The inhabitants of the earth are told, as the Psalmist goes on to say, "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (vs. 11-12).

Since Christians are ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor 5:20), commissioned to engage the fortresses of unbelief scattered throughout the earth, which are none other than Satan's strongholds, it isn't hard to understand how Paul can say that saints do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and powers and principalities in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12). The Church militant is carrying the redeeming light of the cross right into the heart of Satan's kingdom.¹⁸⁶

The Added Heights of Humiliation

And this, it must be observed, utterly humiliates the enemy. What could more greatly afflict Satan's pride or embarrass him than for the very people who once belonged to him, those who were formerly his slaves and pitiful underlings, to march against him in the power of God? And win!

Not long ago, the church of which I'm a member received news from a missionary in the Sudan detailing a breakthrough in the hearts and lives of a tribe he had been ministering to. After much labor and toil, the hard soil of their hearts gave way to a crop of righteousness. Forty-four people bowed the knee to Christ, and

¹⁸⁶ It is worth observing here that the land promise of the OT has been transformed in Christ; expanded to include the whole earth (Rom 4:13; Matt 5:5; Eph 6:1-3), which was really God's intention all along (Gen 1:28). See W.D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, as well as Poythress' *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, chapters 6 and 8.

now they were ready to be baptized. Writing with obvious emotion, this missionary described the occasion as follows,

“It was particularly exciting to see elderly men and ladies come forward to consecrate their lives to God through faith in Jesus Christ. I remember surveying the congregation at one point toward the end of the service and catching a sight of glory – beaming faces, glistening heads. The sunlight was streaming into the church through a large gap at the apex of the thatched roof of the country church. It made the residual beads of water from baptism look like studded jewels and diamonds on the ebony black skin of my new brothers and sisters in Christ. Ministry is full of hardships, heartaches and setbacks. There are frustrations and concerns that perpetually burden our hearts. But this sight of God’s glory over the lives of His recently redeemed people infused something into my heart, a strangely polarized emotion, something between a sigh of relief and a booster cable jolt. As I think about it now, I believe the Lord was communicating divine truths to my tired heart: ‘Relax, rest, I will bring to completion the good work I have begun in My people. Mark,¹⁸⁷ I will cause My name to be glorified in all the earth!’”

Following the joyous occasion, they marched to three different compounds in order to uproot and destroy long-standing family idols. At the first compound he spoke to the people “about the exceedingly great power of our God who cast Satan down and triumphed over him through the cross of His Son.” Immediately following this, he felt led by the Spirit to press this home by doing something “Elijah-like,” as he described it. He wrote,

“I sat my rump down on the biggest and most obvious of the compound idols (a 5 inch-wide, 30 inch high carved stick with a notched knob at the top). The people were shocked as I addressed them from my perch. I said, “If the god of this stick is stronger than the true God of heaven and earth, let

¹⁸⁷ I have changed his name so as to protect his identity.

him come and strike me down! Let him come and defend his idol.” Well, I waited... and nothing happened! Then in the suspense of the moment it dawned on them: “The God of the Bible is the real God!” The silence erupted into spontaneous clapping and singing and dancing. I must say, I was praising God, too! Then the men of the church (and not a few zealous ladies!) laid their hands on the idol and cast it down. The idols and charms were removed from the compound, including a goat’s head and various amulets, and cast into a raging fire, symbolic of Satan’s eternal and infernal demise.”

I had the privilege of watching footage of these Sudanese Christians burn their idols. A local pastor who had visited the region returned with a recording of his travels, particularly the happenings of this burgeoning church. Sitting in Sunday school, we watched with joy-filled hearts as these new Christians, scores of them, danced and sang around a large fire. They held their strange idols in the air and tossed each one in into the blazing inferno, praising God with much celebration and prayer.

At one point in the video, when the people were gathered together talking and milling about, several of the children, perhaps six or seven of them, had composed a song and were eager to perform it. Forming something like a line, these children began to sing of Jesus’ triumph over Satan. They sang of His crushing him. As they sang, they stomped their feet against the ground with enthusiasm, accentuating the point.

As their arms swayed and the dust rose, something occurred to me. In this simple act of praise, Satan was being severely mocked. Just think of it. Mere children, children who once belonged to him—children whose parents and grandparents and great grandparents, a lineage stretching back for eons—were now acting out Christ’s victory over Satan. Is not the pride of Satan brought low through this, brought down to the very depths? Is not God parading the defeat of the evil one and heaping coals of fire on his head?

In order to further punctuate the humiliation of Satan, God has outfitted the church with a peculiar cast of weapons. As His people march across the globe, no longer is there to be a sword and scabbard affixed to her belt. Such weapons have been transformed.¹⁸⁸ By virtue of our union with Christ, the crushing blow of the cross is channeled through the church. This is an amazing move on the part of God. The greatest moment of victory in history, indeed, the very act that most embarrassed and toppled evil, continues to flourish, being channeled through men and women. The same power that crushed Satan flows through the saints. What power is that? It is the life of Christ. His life bleeds

¹⁸⁸ The same is true with holy war. Technically speaking, holy war hasn't been abrogated, but rather transformed. One might ask why God's universal rule of justice didn't equally destroy the Israelites in the OT. In other words, why didn't Israel, during the years of conquest, suffer the same penalty as the Canaanites? They weren't any better. So how did they escape the judgment? Poythress answers, "The OT contains ample indications that God brings the Israelites under His rule by a process of holy war similar to the conquest of Canaan. In the case of the Canaanites the approach of God and His rule means consecration to utter destruction. In the case of Israel the approach of God involves the use of substitutes that are consecrated to destruction: the Passover lamb substitutes for the firstborn of Israel, and animal sacrifices substitute for the people more generally." *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1991), 143-44. The same is no less true in the NT. "As Christians," continues Poythress, "we ourselves are victims of holy war. We have been crucified with Christ, and we have died with Christ. Our flesh has been subjected to destruction. But since Christ was raised from the dead, we also enjoy new life." This helps explain why the Gospel shuns physical violence in our present context. Christ's death as a satisfaction for sin is judicially sufficient for the sins of the world (without distinction and without exception). All men, therefore, are called to repent and escape the coming wrath. The sword does extend to demons, however. Since demons didn't fall within the purview of the cross, they are to be trampled. The sword of the Spirit is to be unsheathed and used against the forces of darkness. Satan is to be resisted. This doesn't mean, however, that we should ever treat the enemy lightly or speak presumptuously or arrogantly (Jude 1:9). But it does mean that we are not to love demonic enemies like human enemies.

into us through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, everything changes.

Passages like Psalm 2 or Matthew 16:18, which envision triumph or an unstoppable advance, should not be understood to mean that the church marches with pomp and kingly apparel, wearing golden crowns or silk robes. Rather, it fulfills its mission by sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Like its head, the church wins through weakness. It triumphs through sacrifice. It strikes the enemy while kneeling in prayer. It advances in humble reliance on God. Christ's crucified life is the blueprint for battle. Recall here again the words of Hendriksen. He said that the redemptive acts of Christ are duplicated in the lives of God's people. This is the key to understanding the church's present mission. Like Christ who embraced the cross, the believer takes up the cross and follows Him, becoming like Him in His death and resurrection. This is the principle means by which the enemy is conquered. This is how God heaps ignominy upon ignominy upon Satan.

Sharing in His Sufferings

Because Christ suffered, we suffer. And just as Christ's sufferings weren't suffered in vain, neither are the saints. Sacrificial love fueled by a fervent desire to spread God's fame and glory functions as the means (and perhaps the greatest of means) by which the kingdom of darkness is combated. So far as the New Testament is concerned, this concept is described as sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Of all the doctrines expounded on the Lord's Day, this is perhaps one of the most neglected. This isn't to say that the subject of suffering isn't discussed or preached. Quite the contrary. Suffering, generally considered, is given ample attention. Where there is sickness, there one will hear the subject of suffering discussed at great length. But how often does someone ask: What are the sufferings of Christ, and how do I share in them? Or when was the last time the following was overheard, "I'm sharing in the

sufferings of Christ”? Someone might describe themselves as a child of Abraham, or a true Jew, or an ambassador of Christ, or talk about being Spirit filled, or even crucified with Christ, but how often does the biblical concept of “sharing in the sufferings of Christ” directly flavor the everyday speech of saints? It is rarely heard.

But for the apostle Paul, our union with Christ, and by extension, our sharing in His sufferings, greatly informed his outlook and expectations. He could scarcely write a letter without touching upon the subject of suffering, and at several key junctures, he spoke freely and pointedly about sharing in Christ’s sufferings (1 Thess 1:6; 3:2-3; 2 Cor 1:5; 4:7-18; Rom 8:17; Gal 6:17; Col 1:24; Phil 1:29; 3:8-10. See also 1 Peter 2:21; 4:13). Not only did the concept imbibe his thinking, emerging effortlessly in his theological train of thought, but he even yearned for it, stating openly his desire to experience such sufferings. Writing to the Philippians, his heart’s desire emerges,

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11).

Here Paul says, incredibly, that he wants to share in Christ’s sufferings, becoming like Him in His death. These are weighty words. So what do they mean? What are the sufferings of Christ and how do we share in them? And more specifically, how is this relevant to the present spiritual struggle?

The Sufferings of Christ

Theologians differ as to the precise meaning and application of Christ's suffering in the life of the believer. There are those who perceive a wider application of Christ's suffering. They would urge that all of the struggles of life, so far as the Christian's pursuit towards holiness is concerned, fall under its heading. Professor Jac Muller, commenting on Philippians 3:10-11, says, "Sharing in the sufferings of Christ, is, therefore, more than just suffering for the sake of Christ (in tribulation and persecution), or in imitation of Christ. It means all suffering, bodily or spiritual, which overtakes the believer by virtue of his new manner of life, his 'Christ life' in a world unbelieving and hostile to Christ."¹⁸⁹ He goes on to cite Lightfoot with approval, who says, "It implies all pangs and all afflictions undergone in the struggle against sin either within or without. The agony of Gethsemane, not less than the agony of Calvary, will be reproduced however faintly in the faithful servant of Christ."¹⁹⁰

From the vantage point of Scripture, this position isn't without warrant. In Hebrews 2:10-18, the author, while discoursing on Christ's fitting acquaintance with suffering for the salvation of the saints, links temptation with suffering. He writes, "For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb 2:18). Clearly, then, Christ's engagements with temptation fall under the more general rubric "sufferings." Seeing how He was tempted in every way as we are (Heb 4:15), His entire life was a trial. It will not do, therefore, to restrict His sufferings to Calvary alone.

While this is no doubt true, the general thrust of the data tends to support a more narrow understanding of the doctrine. One might ask, for example, whether or not the loss of a six month old child should be understood in terms of sharing in the sufferings of Christ. While such loss is certainly tragic and emotionally tearing

¹⁸⁹ *NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 117.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 117

and in every way a form of suffering, it would seem a bit odd for the parents to say, “With the loss of this child, I’m sharing in Christ’s sufferings.” Only in a remote sense would it be true.

The more precise (or narrow understanding) of sharing in the sufferings of Christ is aptly summarized by Gordon Fee. After conducting a careful examination of Philippians 3:10-11, he summarizes his conclusion as follows:

“Thus Christ’s sufferings do not refer to ‘sufferings in general,’ but to those sufferings that culminated in his death, all of which was for the sake of others. Likewise, it is not just any kind of present suffering to which Paul refers in the preceding phrase, but to those which in particular express participation in *Christ’s* sufferings; and the aim, as well as the character, of such suffering is to ‘become like him in his death,’ which almost certainly means suffering that is in some way on behalf of the gospel, thus for the sake of others, since no other suffering is in conformity to his.”¹⁹¹

According to this understanding, the sufferings of Christ are intrinsically missional, bound up with the Messiah’s redemptive purposes. This means that sharing in the sufferings of Christ relate more to persecution in the context of the Great Commission, and by extension, combating the kingdom of darkness, than the natural groanings and frustrations of our present evil age. This explains why the vast majority of texts touching upon this subject have in view the kind of suffering inherent to missions and the inbreaking of the kingdom.

This helps illuminate Paul’s somewhat perplexing words to the Colossians, when he writes, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24). Paul’s missional activities, which inevitably involved conflict and

¹⁹¹ *NINCT, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 335.

persecution (Acts 13:50; 14:19; 2 Cor 11:25; 2 Tim 3:10-11), functioned as an extension of the cross work of Christ. This does not mean that the cross was deficient in any sense, but rather that the believer becomes a partaker of the afflictions of Christ and embodies the same serpent-crushing tactics as Christ.¹⁹²

2 Corinthians 4:7-18 is instructive here. After cataloging a series of ministerial trials, including being perplexed and struck down (vs. 7-9), Paul immediately grounds these tribulations in having been united to Christ. He writes,

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (2 Cor 4:10-12).

Paul's words are striking. Both the life and death of Christ are at work in the believer, budding and flowering in the context of suffering, as if the very troubles of ministry provide the spring rains for its growth. Paul's life is one of continual dying, even dying daily (1 Cor 15:30-31), and he can take up the words of the Psalmist, who said, "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted

¹⁹² Commenting on Galatians 6:17, where Paul says that he bears on his body the marks of Jesus, which more than likely refers to his scars, Herman Ridderbos writes, "They are called marks of *Jesus*, not because Paul received the same wounds in his body which Jesus received, but because in these tokens his fellowship in suffering with Jesus becomes manifest. This demonstrates also that what the believers must suffer at the hands of the world's enmity is the same thing that Jesus had to undergo—not the same in its fruit, but in its nature. Incidentally, this suffering is more than an affliction for the sake of or in consequence of following Jesus. A certain transfer of suffering from Jesus to the believers takes place by virtue of the fellowship, the corporative and federal oneness existing between them."¹⁹² *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 228.

as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom 8:36).¹⁹³ For him, and for all those united to Christ, the task of spreading the gospel isn’t an activity restricted to the words which might come out of one’s mouth (as indispensable as that might be), but it is an activity involving the whole man. It is a sacrificial activity, a painful activity, one where the power of Christ’s life, a power manifested through weakness and suffering, stretches out through the skin of the Christian, and is received through the brandings of persecution. This is why Paul can say, “Therefore I *endure* all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

Recapitulation

Nothing could be more infuriating or frustrating to Satan than for Christians to pillage his kingdom in a manner mirroring that of the great Serpent-crusher Himself. But this is exactly what union with Christ entails. God fills each believer with the Holy Spirit and directs them to walk as the Son walked. Therefore, since the Father turned autonomy on its head and used evil for good in the life of Christ, He likewise works out all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Since Christ triumphed through weakness and suffering, then we too triumph through weakness and suffering (2 Cor 4:7; 12:9). Since Christ broke the

¹⁹³ Philip Hughes, commenting on 2 Cor 4:10-11, writes, “Christ, it is true, has left the Christian an example of patience and perseverance in suffering (1 Peter 2:21; Heb 12:3); so that they who wish to come after Him must *daily* take up their cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23). But Paul is speaking of something more than example. Between Master and follower there is a certain unity of experience and destiny. There is an inclusiveness of the latter in the former. It was Christ Himself who said, ‘A servant is not greater than his lord; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you’ (John 15:20). There is a fellowship of Christ’s sufferings which means a conformity to His death (Phil. 3:10). Martyrdom, for Paul, was not confined to the hour of his death in Rome; it was expressed daily and constantly in his dying-living existence.” *NICNT, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 142.

power of sin, God likewise breaks the power of sin in the lives of His people (Rom 6). And since God embarrassed Satan through the death of His Son, we too embarrass the Evil One by walking by faith.

This appears to be the import of a number of passages. In 1 Cor 1:27-29, for example, Paul says that “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” Among the vast throng of proud men, none equal Satan. He embodies the very apex of arrogance, believing that he is wiser and stronger and worthy of more adulation than God Himself. But in response, God takes the weak things of this world, the despised things, the most unlikely candidates, and shames Satan through them.

Let it also not be forgotten how such foolish things of the world were selected. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were chosen by God (vs. 27). He says, “[It is] because of Him you are in Christ Jesus” (vs. 30). If ever there was a doctrine designed to absolutely eviscerate the pride of men, it is surely the doctrine of predestination. It is anti-autonomous to the core. It says to all the would-be gods, “You are not the Lord, I Am” (Rom 9:15-22), and removes all grounds (both potential and actual) for boasting (2 Timothy 2 Tim 1:9; Rom 9:11). This is why Paul ends his thought in the first chapter of Corinthians with these words, “As it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” (vs. 31). Election smashes pride.

Part of the genius of using these weak vessels is to more greatly illuminate God’s power, which further confounds the devil. In 2 Cor 4:7, Paul considers the matter of his body and the sublimity of the glory of God (vs. 6). He writes, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” What are these jars of clay? They are none other than our fragile and clay-like bodies. We are but simple pieces of earthenware housing great and glorious things. But this is the

perfect medium for displaying God's power. If a person can take something exceedingly inadequate for a task and accomplish great ends through such a thing, it more greatly magnifies the author of those acts. In this respect, Paul writes that he suffered great hardships in the province of Asia and even despaired of death. "But this happened," he explains, "that we might not rely on ourselves but on God" (2 Cor 1:9b, NIV). In the same way, his struggles with his thorn in the flesh, along with his many petitions to have it removed, were met with these words, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." In response, Paul said, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor 12:9).¹⁹⁴

Infuriating Faith

All of this enrages Satan (Rev 12:17; 1 Peter 5:8)). But as with nearly everything else observed thus far, his rage secures ironic results. The more Satan beats against the church, killing Christians and inflicting them with pain, the more the church grows (Acts 8:1-4; 12:24). The more he seeks their demise, desiring to devour them, God's power and sustaining grace are given more opportunity to shine. Every challenge and obstacle is used to build character in the lives of God's people (Rom 5:3-5). Each demonic swipe serves to make the saint more like Christ (Rom 8:29).¹⁹⁵ As the Christian responds in faith and praise, even in the midst of terrible suffering, his songs and prayers of reliance sting the domain of darkness. They mock and irritate them, for here is a weak and pitiful creature trusting in Christ, the very One they love, while having not yet seen Him (1 Peter 1:8; John 20:29).

An incident in the life of William Carey will help illustrate the point. In the year 1812, while Carey was teaching in Calcutta, a

¹⁹⁴ For a helpful exposition of the role of suffering in the life of Paul, see Thomas R. Schreiner's volume, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, chapter 4.

¹⁹⁵ It should also be remembered that with each swipe their just condemnation continues to mount (1 Thess 2:16).

fire erupted in the printing room where years of his labor and research were stored. A completed Sanskrit dictionary, part of a Bengal dictionary, two grammar books, and ten translations of the Bible were lost. Various type sets for printing over a dozen languages, English paper, and host of other cherished items were all devoured, burnt and lost in one dire moment. When he returned and surveyed the remains, he wept and said,

“In one short evening the labours of years are consumed. How unsearchable are the ways of God. I had lately brought some things to the utmost perfection of which they seemed capable, and contemplated the missionary establishment with perhaps too much self-congratulation. The Lord has laid me low, that I may look more simply to him.”¹⁹⁶

Writing a short time later, a glimpse into his faith is revealed,

“The loss is heavy, but as traveling a road the second time is usually done with greater ease than the first time, so I trust the work will lose nothing of real value. We are not discouraged; indeed the work is already begun again in every language. We are cast down but not in despair.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ *The One Year Book of Christian History* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 142-43.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Michael Rusten tells what happened next. He writes, “Carey resolved to trust God that from the embers would come a better press and more scholarly translations. Within a few months Carey had set up shop in a warehouse. Little did Carey know that the fire would bring him and his work to the attention of people all over Europe and America as well as India. In just fifty days in England and Scotland alone, about ten thousand pounds were raised for rebuilding Carey’s publishing enterprise. So much money was coming in that Andrew Fuller, Carey’s friend and a leader of his mission in England, told his committee when he returned from a fund-raising trip, ‘We must stop the contributions.’ Many volunteers came to India to help as well. By 1832 Carey’s rebuilt and expanded printing operation had published complete Bibles or portions of the Bible in forty-four languages and dialects!”

When a saint responds like this in the face of great loss, one cannot help but think that such faith pierces the darkness like a sudden streak of lightning. Demons surely burn with embarrassment and frustration.

In this vein, think of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the faith chapter. There it says that faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Faith is the firm reliance on God as the all-sufficient One, the One whose Word can be trusted above all else. This is precisely what Satan and his demons cannot stomach. Such faith is foolishness to them. It is something to be mocked and opposed. But what does God do? He commends such faith and blesses it. He takes people like Abraham, or Noah, or Sarah, or Gideon, weak vessels with a multitude of shortcomings, and blesses them, securing for them many great promises.

Such is the design of God. The demonic path of self-sought praise is met with disastrous results. Instead of obtaining glory, they are bitterly dishonored, being made to taste defeat through not only Christ, but the vast, star-like multitude of His followers (Heb 11:1-40). It is as John writes in the twelfth chapter Revelation,

“And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev 12:10-11).

Glory Taken and Glory Given

History teaches a valuable lesson. If a man exalts himself, he will be brought low, “for God opposes the proud” (James 4:6).

In the days of long ago, Satan believed he could attain glory apart from God by assuming the rights of deity. But throughout this long tale of history, God has been opposing the idea, tearing down the house of the proud, and unveiling its folly for all to see. In the end, this “Babylon” falls in disgrace. We know it because we have already seen it in part. But we also know it because God has ordained it. In the eighteenth chapter of Revelation, John speaks of the demise of this great demonic city. He writes,

“And he called out with a mighty voice, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living’” (Rev 18:2-3).

After another voice erupts from heaven, calling the people of God to come out from this adulterous city, the following is heard,

“Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, ‘I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.’ For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her” (Rev 18:6-8).

Here is the great self-exultation and ensuing abasement of Satan. He says, as it were, “I sit as a queen,” thereby glorifying himself. But to this God responds with judgment, paying him back with a double portion, causing him to drink the dregs of sin, which

always brings degradation and ruin, the very opposite of glory and honor.

The consummation of this judgment is hell, that place where every last vestige of glory is extinguished forever. This is the place where sin culminates, and where the sinner experiences the full weight of “that-which-God-is-not.” Here there is no glory for the sinner. No pleasure. No joy. No life. Here is where the opposite of God’s nature rolls over the creature, being poured out by Him who judges justly (Rev 14:10). This is what it means to be thrown away from His presence (Rev 20:14-15; 2 Thess 1:9). The Lord is still there, as there is no space where man or angel can flee from His presence, but the goodness of His presence will not be felt, only wrath. This is the place where our experiences with sin on earth multiply and break free from restraint. This is the place where anxiety attacks, which are felt only in part here, obtain full strength. This is the place where depression overwhelms the sinner; where sorrow engulfs; where confusion reigns; where beauty flees, where guilt, grief, hate, sickness, disunity, clamor, and all other manner of ungodly effects churn. This is the place where the worm never dies, but is always dead (Rev 20:14).¹⁹⁸

Hell is a terrifying reality, and it has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41).

In contradistinction to this, and in contradistinction to Satan’s self-adulating quest, there is a glory to be obtained. God not only opposes the proud, as the verse says, but, “He gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). One of the wonderful truths about God is His willingness, even eagerness, to give good gifts to His children (Matt

¹⁹⁸ Distinguishing the torments of hell, Turretin writes, “The negative evils [of hell] are separation from God and Christ and privation of the divine vision: in which is placed the happiness of the saint... a privation of light, joy, glory, felicity and life, and of all the good things whatsoever kind they may be. On the other hand, the positive evils are manifold. These are adumbrated by pains and tortures, by torments, by groans and grief, by cries and wailings, by weeping and gnashing of teeth, by the gnawing worm, by the unquenchable fire and other things of like nature...” *Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1997), 605.

7:11). As has already been noted, God has blessed us in Christ with *every* spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). We have everything! He makes us partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). He makes us sons and daughters (Eph 1:5). He gives us the earth (Matt 5:5). He gives us everlasting and abundant life (John 6:40; 7:38). He makes our names great, as with Abraham, or David, or Mary, the woman with the alabaster jar of perfume (Matt 26:13; Heb 11:2). Astonishingly, Christ says, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise" (Heb 2:12). He not only loves us, but dies for us, providing the deepest kind of security a heart could ever want or imagine. Even our present sufferings are achieving for us an eternal glory (2 Cor 4:17). At the end, when our lowly bodies are raised, we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye and glorified. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged, and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God for all eternity" (Question 38). It is Christ Jesus Himself who "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Philippians 3:21). Indeed, God's goal for us is nothing less than glorification (Rom 8:30). Glory is to be obtained. Listen again to Jesus' prayer,

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:22-24).

The Mountain Range of God's Glory

This book began with a consideration of Satan's rationale. It was noted that at the very center of his awful idea was a desire to obtain supreme glory, to actually experience God's joy and majesty as God. Traveling through redemptive history, God's response to Satan has been seen in a variety of ways. Certain details have been explored and woven together, forming larger panoramas. But when it comes to the subject of God's glory, there is no greater height. It encompasses and envelopes everything. Every thread of history, every jot and tittle of life, every movement from the smallest atom to the expanding universe, falls under its umbrella.

As this section on glory comes to a close, it is important to take a step back and consider the entire mountain range, to ascend the Himalayan heights of this issue where we can see, or attempt to see, the ultimate refutation of Satan, as well as the ultimate meaning of life itself. It is from this vantage point where one can better see how the two relate.

To get at this, a very old question needs to be asked.

Why Create the Devil?

Everyone from analytical philosophers to near toddling children have asked the question, "If God knew Lucifer was going to sin, why did He create him?"

The amount of material that could be read on this subject, given its relationship to the problem of evil, is vast and daunting. Intricate and highly sophisticated theories have been written, challenging the keenest of minds. One need only pick up Alvin Plantinga's little book "God, Freedom and Evil" to realize how complicated this discussion can be. In some ways, these works are important. Complex questions deserve complex answers. Yet, one cannot help but be struck with the Bible's forthrightness at times. While certain things are certainly hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16), and while the systematizing of theology is the queen of the sciences, God has a way of saying things plainly. In the case of the present question, the Bible doesn't directly supply an answer, but it does

address it sufficiently. To the extent that it answers this question, to that same extent one will better understand how Satan's quest for ungodly glory has been made a public spectacle.

Suppose the question "If God knew Lucifer was going to sin, why did He create him?" was altered. Suppose it was changed to: "If God knew Pharaoh was going to harden his heart, why did He create him?" To this there is a clear answer. Speaking to Moses, the LORD, with perfect clarity, explains why Pharaoh was born, allowed to live, and eventually ascend to the throne. In Exodus 9:16, it reads, "But for this purpose I have raised you [Pharaoh] up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

The answer is startlingly clear. The reason God raised Pharaoh up was to provide a context whereby He could display His power for the glory of His Name. That's the plain and simple truth of the passage.

More can be said. In the verse preceding Exodus 9:16, it states that God could have easily destroyed Pharaoh. Instead of ten plagues, there could have been one. Whether with flies, or frogs, or the angel of death, any of those could have been used to extinguish the pagan king from the start. Listen to verse 15 in conjunction with verse 16:

"For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

Pharaoh didn't have to live. God could have cut him off. He could have done it while the man was a child, or while he was being formed in his mother's womb. He could have done it by causing his parents to die in their youth or to have never met. He could have done it by causing the nation of Egypt to never flourish or to never exist. He could have done it by altering the table of nations. He could have done it by ending the human race at the flood. He could have done it by allowing Adam and Eve to perish

immediately, leaving the vast record of human history bare. He could have done it by intervening in the Garden, by not allowing the Serpent to enter that sacred place. And He could have done it by not creating Satan at all.

But He did create that angel. And He not only created Lucifer, but allowed him to enter the Garden, knowing what would happen.

So why?

A Glory Denied and a Glory Displayed

If it's true that there swelled within the heart of Satan an intense desire to obtain an unlawful glory for himself, and by extension to defame and steal God's glory, then God's reason for allowing Satan's awful idea to play out in history makes excellent sense. In allowing this proud spirit to pursue his sinful ambitions, God has orchestrated the greatest of twists. How ironic would it be if after all these many eons, after all of Satan's schemes and God dishonoring strategies, it is shown that his sin, in all its many facets, playing out in nearly every conceivable way, has been used to greatly magnify and display God's glory? That would forever seal the question of who is really Lord. That would forever turn his quest for ungodly glory inside out.

This is essentially the irony encapsulated in the cross extended to all of history. As Paul writes to the Romans, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). In order for this verse to be true, God would have to be able to oversee and providentially guide every last particle in the universe, not least of which includes the machinations of Satan. Think of that. *Everything* is working out for good. *Everything* is done according to His pleasure (Psalm 115:3; 135:6). *Everything* is accentuating unto His glory. "For from him and through him and to him," writes Paul, "are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:36).

In this respect, human history is a twofold history. In those instances where men and angels rebel against the revealed will of God, their sin tells a pointed story. Its awfulness is made evident. Sin doesn't secure real happiness. It doesn't instill life. Sin produces pain and misery. We have seen that it steals beauty and inherits shame and negates strength. We have seen that it leaves the mind in a constant state of contradiction and frustration and futility. Glory is not to be obtained through sin. In each instance of history where sin flourishes, which is supposed to strike at God's glory, it empirically demonstrates the goodness of God's ways. It shows by way of contrast the sharp difference between light and darkness. It shows its folly.¹⁹⁹

But there is another aspect, indeed, a deeper aspect that corresponds to this. By allowing sin to enter history, God's nature and attributes, which are the essence of His glory, are provided a unique context with which to shine. His justice and wrath and mercy and grace would not have been able to shine with the same effulgence had Satan never been created and allowed to fall (Rom 9:22-23).²⁰⁰ In other words, Satan is caught in a Catch-22. Where

¹⁹⁹ Dr. Bruce Little in his lecture, "Evil and the God Who Knows," mistakenly says, "Because of the moral structure of the universe... there is such a thing as gratuitous evil in this world... [which means that there is] evil that has no purpose. That does not mean that God does not know about it, but that if I were to walk down the aisle and slug one of you hard enough to knock you out or knock a tooth out, I am not willing to say that that happens so that some greater good might come from it. I would simply say that there is evil in this world that has no point to it. Abortion is one. Slavery is another. And you can go on down the line." Not only is this wrong in point of fact, as all things work together for good (Rom 8:28), but it overlooks the larger point of history's revealing the true nature of sin. Everything is meaningful in God's eternal decree.

²⁰⁰ Edwards writes, "One end why God suffered Satan to do what he did in procuring the fall of man was that his Son might be glorified in conquering that strong, subtle, and proud spirit, and triumphing over him. How glorious does Christ Jesus appear in baffling and triumphing over this proud king of darkness, and all the haughty confederate rulers of hell. How glorious a sight is it to see the meek and patient Lamb of God leading that proud, malicious, and mighty enemy in triumph! What songs does this cause in heaven! It was a glorious

sin abounds, God uses it for His glory, thereby showing His wrath and power. Yet He also uses sin to demonstrate His grace and love, which likewise brings Him glory.

Concerning the Egyptians, the LORD says,

“And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Exodus 14:17-18; see also Rom 3:5-8).

Regarding His grace and mercy, Paul teaches,

“Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:20-21).

Edwards is very helpful here. In a work entitled, *Wisdom Displayed in Salvation*, he writes,

“By this contrivance for our redemption, God’s greatest dishonor is made an *occasion* of his greatest glory. Sin is a thing by which God is greatly dishonored. The nature of its principle is enmity against God, and contempt of him. And man, by his rebellion, has greatly dishonored God. But this

sight in Israel, who came out with timbrels and with dances, and sang, ‘Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.’ But how much more glorious to see the Son of David, the Son of God, carrying the head of the spiritual Goliath, the champion of the armies of hell, in triumph to the heavenly Jerusalem! It is with a principal view to this, that Christ is called, ‘the Lord of hosts, or armies, and a man of war,’ Exo. 15:3. And Psa. 24:8, ‘Who is this king of glory! The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.’” *Wisdom Displayed in Salvation* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 148. For a similar thought, see Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, volume II, Discourse X.

dishonor, by the contrivance of our redemption, is made an occasion of the greatest manifestation of God's glory that ever was. Sin, the greatest evil, is made an occasion of the greatest good. It is the nature of a principle of sin that it seeks to dethrone God. But this is made an occasion of the greatest manifestation of God's royal majesty and glory that ever was."²⁰¹

However Satan might scheme, and however he might appear to gain some victory, God's glory, the very thing he most wants to supplant, is displayed. Most ironic of all, he served as the catalyst for this unimaginable outpouring of glory. This knowledge must be unbearable to the devil.

So why did God create Lucifer?

To display His glory. That is the ultimate reason.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Ibid., 148

²⁰² For a closer look at this subject, especially as it relates to the question of evil and suffering, see appendix B.

Conclusion

-An Awful Idea Exposed and Refuted-

In many ways, this book has been all about the LORD's declaration, "I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22).

As much as the human race needs to know and cherish this truth, we have seen that the statement extends equally beyond the walls of the physical realm to the great heavenly hosts, both angelic and demonic. With the advent of Satan's awful idea, history, both human and angelic, has been radically preoccupied with this truth.

In the case of humanity, the origin of this dispute remains largely shrouded in mystery. Not a few theologians have burnt oil long into the night thinking about this subject. They have pondered the pages of Scripture, intent on pulling back the curtain, even if ever so slightly, just to gain some clue as to what happened so very long ago. The fruit of such labor depends, somewhat, on the methodology employed. For those students of Scripture who search out texts directly addressing the issue, they often come away shrugging their shoulders, as there is little, if any, direct evidence to be found. Others, unsatisfied with the results, dig further and peer under an assortment of biblical rocks, hoping to unearth clues that can be woven together and formulated into some kind of whole. It would seem that during the past 100 years or so, the former approach has been largely the norm.

The interests of theology have a way of flowing with the tides and concerns of the times. It would seem that the issue of Satan's fall hasn't been an issue of particular concern. As a result, it has been left on the shelf of the past. Or perhaps it would be correct to say that the issue has flashed more brightly on the radar of the charismatic camp, a segment of the church not especially known for

its systematic treatments of biblical doctrine.²⁰³ Whatever might be the reason,²⁰⁴ this work has attempted to push the discussion forward by adopting a more biblical theological approach, one firmly rooted in the convictions of the Reformed tradition.

Here something Douglas Wilson once wrote in a little volume on baptism is pertinent. While discussing methodology, he said,

“Many Christians have come to baptistic conclusions because they simply took a Bible and a concordance, and then looked up every incident on baptism in the New Testament. This is objectionable, not because they studied the passages concerned with baptism, but because they did *not* look up all the passages that addressed parents, circumcision, Gentiles,

²⁰³ This isn't meant as an insult, but simply my own anecdotal appraisal. There are certainly a number of fine scholars in that group, and I wouldn't want to denigrate them.

²⁰⁴ In his superb lecture, *Christus Victor*, Sinclair Ferguson outlines three reasons why studies in the atonement, in recent centuries, have failed to adequately cover the satanic crushing element of the cross. He prefaces his three points by saying, “Theologians in the Reformed Tradition...have given relatively little attention to this particular aspect of Christ's work. The standard textbooks of the Reformed Churches, from Turretin through Hodge to Berkhof, give little attention to the great biblical theme of Christ's conquest over Satan.” As for the first reason, Ferguson says, “The agenda for the discussion of the work of Jesus Christ was already settled in the twelfth century, following the landmark expositions of the atonement by Anselm... and shortly afterwards by the response of Peter Abelard.” Those two essentially framed the discussion, causing theologians to either focus on the objective aspect of the atonement or the subjective aspect. “The second reason for this relative lack of interest in Reformed theology,” says Ferguson, “is that in the development of Reformed theology in the 17th century some shift of interest is apparent. Often this is expressed as a shift of interest from *Historia Salutis*...to *Ordo Salutis*.” The third, and possibly the most important reason, “is the discrediting of the view of some of the early fathers as to how that victory and conquest was accomplished, namely, by the payment of a ransom to Satan.” All of these points are elaborated. To stress again, the lecture is superb, easily one of the best on the subject. It can be found online at:

<http://media1.wts.edu/media/audio/insf01-copyright.mp3>

Jews, olive trees, and countless other important areas. In other words, the subject is bigger than it looks.”²⁰⁵

Whether one agrees with paedobaptism is neither here nor there. The salient point is that when it comes to studying a complex theological issue, one must beware of myopia. The student of Scripture must consider all of Scripture, even those areas that do not, at first blush, appear to touch upon the subject. So it is with this subject.

The contention has been that much can be gleaned by not only asking a few fresh questions, but especially by drawing a connection between the outworking of sin on earth and Satan, as well as God’s peculiar method of combating evil. This allows one to work backwards from the data to the original cause. Like a detective analyzing a crime scene, effort has been made to formulate a theory that best explains the data.

Think of the epic series *Star Wars*. When episodes 4, 5, and 6 were first released, the viewer was thrust into the world of Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. Unaware of Anakin’s past, we were nevertheless able to draw a number of conclusions about the man, some more certain than others. We were able to do this by working backwards from the data. We either drew inferences or made direct deductions. When the first three episodes were later released, the past, while certainly enriched with unexpected information and twists, didn’t entirely surprise us. In fact, we anticipated a number of the events, shrouded as they were.²⁰⁶

Human history is similar in this respect. While the church hasn’t been given the script of episode one, the ensuing story and struggle allows one to confidently sketch a portrait of it. The vast pool of biblical information provides a truly rich quantity of material.

²⁰⁵ *To A Thousand Generations* (Moscow: Canon Press, 1996), 11.

²⁰⁶ *The Count of Monte Cristo* might provide an even better example. If a person only had the last three quarters of the book (or movie), think through how much he could discern of the (earlier) betrayal through the peculiar actions of Edmond’s vengeance. Much could be undoubtedly discerned.

In the case of human sin, it has been shown that it directly mirrors Satan's original and awful idea. The two are like fire and heat. In the case of redemptive history, it isn't without great purpose that the beginning and end of the account, that is, both Genesis and Revelation, the book ends of the Bible, prominently feature Satan. Human history is, undoubtedly, framed in the light of his influence.

These significant features allow the student of Scripture to trace God's peculiar response to sin back to Satan and the original dispute arising between them. Think of the Protestant Reformation, in this respect. As it was in the days of the Reformers, when the five great *solas* were penned and defended, so too, but on a much larger scale, the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness has unveiled a number of perennial truths.

Now if a historian were only able to hear the protests of the Reformers, having in their possession only their writings and creeds, they could very fairly reconstruct the essential tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, and by extension, the Pope, the head of that organization. In much the same way, we have noted a number of other *solas* emerging out of God's conflict with sin. The following six truths have been observed:

Sola Vita (Life is found in Christ alone)

Sola Gaudium (Joy is found in Christ alone)

Sola Sapientia (Wisdom is found in Christ alone)

Sola Potestas (Power is found in Christ alone)

Sola Victoria (Victory is found in Christ alone)

Sola Gloria (Glory is found in Christ alone)

Through the above truths, God has been systematically dismantling the notion of sin. But not sin merely in the abstract. All of them converge on and combat a representative creature, namely, Satan. Given this basic presupposition, one need only flip the coin over to better understand Satan's original sin, seeing how each refutation addresses a specific aspect of the idea. The task simply becomes one of reconstruction.

In the end, the argument has been that Satan didn't just happen to sin in the primordial past, nor did he simply commit an isolated act that could be labeled as sin. Rather, the contention is that Satan's original sin was sin itself; not so much in its conception, but sin as a way of life, or a metaphysical ultimate, informing and directing one's outlook and thoughts. This was an idea that could be preached to the angels, an idea, that, when spun in the right fashion, appeared to promise gain and pleasure and wisdom and glory. If wielded correctly, this powerful potential could even, it was thought, elevate one beyond the ranks of creatureliness to the very throne itself. This is the promise and lie of sin. And it is this that greatly informs us about the meaning of human history.

Every Knee Shall Bow

God's response to this idea has been slowly unfolding over the course of human history. The story isn't over yet. If anything has been apparent during this long turning of the page towards eternity, it is that God works in ways that utterly amaze and baffle onlookers. One can only wonder what is in store for us. What will the final chapters of history look like? What twists await? What great manifestations of His glory remain locked up, waiting to be revealed?

No one knows exactly. But one thing we do know is that the kingdom of darkness is going to completely crumble. We know that Christ is going to deliver the kingdom over to God the Father "after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For," as the Scriptures go on to say, "He must reign until he has put all His enemies under His feet" (1 Cor 15:24-25). And we know that the last enemy is death itself (vs. 26).

There is something else that is going to happen, something equally as astounding and breathtaking. When the end comes, we are told that every knee is going to bow, and every tongue is going to confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:9-11). Not insignificantly, Paul adds that at the name of Jesus every knee is going to bow, "in

heaven and on the earth and under the earth” (vs. 10). What a sight that will be! For Christians this scene inspires great hope and joy. But think of all of Christ’s enemies. They too are going to bow down and confess His Lordship. Ponder it. If human history is all about a challenge of authorities, a question of who is really Lord, then this monumental moment marks the ultimate triumph and victory of Christ. This is when everyone openly acknowledges who alone is King.

But here a poignant question emerges. What inspires this confession? Is it the vision of God? That surely plays a vital role. But here it must be remembered that the angels beheld God in the beginning, and some chose to spurn the Lordship of Christ. Likewise, when the mass of humanity sees the Lord, they will no doubt bow out of fear, and certainly confess His greatness, trembling like demons (James 2:19), but will they confess out of a certain assurance and knowledge that Jesus is *supremely*, even solely, Lord? Will all the demons and unbelievers, and Satan himself, assent to Christ’s rightful and unique authority? Will their confession include a firm recognition of sin’s failure?

I believe it will.

That is what history is presently teaching us. Near incalculable volumes of evidence is currently being gathered for the great court hearing, when all will be disclosed, weighed and judged. Every last vestige and every conceivable angle of Satan’s treasonous claim will be highlighted and exposed for what it is. All the acts, all the currents of time, all the human testimonies, all the grand sweeps and microscopic details will present indisputable evidence. God will shut every mouth. He will stop every argument. All the secrets of men’s hearts will be laid bare, and we will know as we are known (1 Cor 13:12).

After all of this, each and every soul will know, and *infallibly* know, that Jesus Christ is Lord. And they will confess this from their knees.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Appendix A

-An Analysis of Edwards' View of the Fall of Satan-

In his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Francis Turretin divided the opinions of theologians, regarding the nature of the first angelic sin, into three camps. He writes,

“There are various opinions about it [the species of the angelic sin] among theologians, especially among the Scholastics. For to say nothing of the licentiousness which is absurdly said to have been their sin, not only by Josephus and Philo with the Jews, but many of the fathers (Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Lactantius and others) from Gen 6:2 (falsely understood); there are two principal opinions among the learned. The first of those who think it was envy and hatred of man arising from the decree revealed to them concerning the advancement of the human nature in Christ above the angelic (who was to take upon him by incarnation not angels, but the seed of Abraham). The other (more common among the Scholastics) is that of those who maintain that it was pride.”²⁰⁷

After dismissing the licentious position as an absurdity, Turretin mentions a view rarely expressed today. In fact, I suspect that most Christians aren't aware of this perspective, seeing that (1) this subject is rarely discussed in great detail, and if it is, then (2), the second view mentioned, namely, pride, is often considered in isolation from the others, as if they didn't exist.

This first view, as Turretin states, centers largely on the disclosure of the divine decree to the angels that men and women would be united to Christ and thereby elevated above the angels. Believing the task of ministering to humans to be well beneath

²⁰⁷ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992), 602

them, certain angels chose to rebel. One might call this the divine disclosure view.

It's hard to find representative voices of this position today. More typically, one must travel back in history to find proponents of the theory. For our present purposes, we will examine the view of Jonathan Edwards, as he not only endorses the divine disclosure view, but, given his stature in the Reformed world, and given my having leaned heavily on his writings in this present volume, he naturally emerges as an excellent candidate for further study.

His position is interesting, to say the least. And more than once, while wading through Edwards' thoughts on the subject, I found myself pausing and reflecting for some time on his reasoning. In the end, I cannot say that I find his position entirely persuasive. Hence the present volume. Nevertheless, it deserves special consideration. Therefore, in what is to follow, I will first outline his view, using largely his own words, and then offer a brief critique, highlighting both the position's strengths and weaknesses.

Edwards' View

In a section entitled *Miscellaneous Observations*, a place where Edwards jots his thoughts down in a patchwork fashion, we find him pondering the subject of the fall of the angels. A few quotes will serve to summarize his position.

[320.] "*Devils*. It seems to me probable that the temptation of the angels, which occasioned their rebellion, was that when God was about to create man, or had first created him, God declared his decree to the angels that one of that human nature should be his Son, his best beloved, his greatest favorite, and should be united to his eternal Son: that he should be their Head and King, that they should be given to him and should worship him and be his servants, attendants, and ministers. God having thus declared his great love to the race of mankind, gave the angels the charge of them as ministering spirits to men. Satan, or Lucifer or Beelzebub,

being the archangel, one of the highest of the angels, could not bear it, thought it below him, and a great debasing of him. So he conceived rebellion against the Almighty, and drew away a vast company of the heavenly hosts with him.”²⁰⁸

[939.] “*Occasion of the Fall of the Angels.* We cannot but suppose that it was made known to the angels at their first creation, that they were to be ministering spirits to men and to serve the Son of God in that way, by ministering to them as those that were peculiarly beloved of him, because this was their proper business for which they were made. This was the end of their creation. It is not to be supposed that seeing they were intelligent creatures that were to answer the end of their beings as voluntary agents, or as willingly falling in with the design of their Creator, that God would make them and not make known to them what they were made for, when he entered into covenant with them and established the conditions of their eternal happiness, especially when they were admiring spectators of the creation of this beloved creature for whose good they were made, and this visible world that God made for his habitation. Seeing God made the angels for a special service, it is reasonable to suppose that the faithfulness of the angels in that special service must be the condition of their reward or wages. If this was the great condition of their reward, then we may infer that it was their violating this law, and refusing and failing of this condition, which was that by which they fell. Hence we may infer that the occasion of their fall was God’s revealing this their end and special service to them, and their not complying with it. That must be the occasion of their fall.”²⁰⁹

Commenting further on how certain angels felt about ministering to the humans, Edwards writes,

²⁰⁸ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 607.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 611.

“[438] Probably they thought it would be degradation and misery to be ministers to a creature of an inferior nature, whom God was about to create, and subjects and servants to one in that nature, not knowing particularly how it was to be, God having only in general revealed it to them. They thought it would be best for themselves to resist, and endeavor to be independent of God’s government and ordering; and, having an appetite to their own honour, it overcame holy dispositions...”²¹⁰

Edwards even appears to teach that this unveiling of the divine program for human beings functioned as the trial of their obedience. In section [937] he says, “Probably the service appointed them [the angels] as the great trial of their obedience, was serving Christ, or ministering to him in his great work that he had undertaken with respect to mankind.”²¹¹ Like Adam and Eve, the angels were presented with a test. They had to choose whether they would submit to and obey God’s Word.

It is to be observed that this view does not deny the presence of pride in the fall of Satan. In another place, while commenting on Ezekiel 28, he says, “The iniquity by which he [Satan] fell was *pride*, or his being lifted up by reason of his superlative beauty and brightness.” Edwards even admits that Satan, as a result of the fall, sought to establish his own government, and that “Lucifer aspired to be ‘like the Most High.’” The striking difference between Edwards’ view and that of the “pride camp” is the mitigating circumstances surrounding this pride. Satan, as has been stated, thought it beneath him to minister to humans, especially given how they were going to be united to Christ and elevated to a lofty height. It is this peculiar difference that sets Edwards (or the position) apart.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 607. Edwards quotes Dr. Goodwin with approval. Dr. Goodwin writes, “A lower degree of accursed pride fell into the heart of the devil himself, whose sin in his first apostatizing from God, is conceived to be a stomaching that man should be one day advanced unto the hypostatical union, and be one person with the Son of God, whose proud angelical nature (then in actual existence, *the highest of creatures*) could not brook.”

²¹¹ Ibid., 606.

What Compelled Edwards Towards This View?

Naturally, one will look in vain for specific scriptural texts supporting this outlook. Therefore, the only way to arrive at this viewpoint is to work backwards from a compilation of texts and concepts, to read between the lines, as it were, and draw inferences from God's peculiar means of redemption. Whole swaths of biblical theology must be woven together. Here I share a common conviction and adopt a similar methodology as Edwards. He looks at God's methods of combating Satan, especially the nature of Christ's incarnation and redemptive works, along with the ironic means used to overthrow the devil, and draws a direct line between these facts and the primordial past.

Two examples will help illustrate the point. After detailing Satan's rebellion in the face of God's revelation for humanity, Edwards writes,

“But he [Satan] was cast down from the highest pitch of glory to the lowest hell for it, and himself was made an occasion of bringing to pass which his spirit so rose against, yea, his spite and malice was made an occasion of it, and that same act of his by which he thought he had entirely overthrown the design, and that same person in human nature which they could not bear should rule over them in glory, and should be their King and Head, to communicate happiness to them, by this means proves their King in spite of them, and becomes their Judge; and though they would not be his willing subjects, they shall be his unwilling captives, he shall be their sovereign to make them miserable and pour out his wrath upon them; and mankind whom they so envied and so scorned, are by occasion of them advanced to higher glory and honour, and greater happiness, and more nearly united to God; and though they disdained to be ministering spirits to

them, yet now they shall be judged by them as assessors with Jesus Christ.”²¹²

Similar points are made to this effect throughout his *Miscellaneous Observations* [see 936 and 941]. Edwards sees in Christ’s incarnation a telling sign. Drawing on the details of Jesus’ mission, especially as it relates to the war against sin and Satan, he is driven to the conclusion that this pivotal event is reacting, in some measure, to circumstances precipitating the fall of man. One might say that redemptive history is far too intertwined to posit anything less.

Another interesting quote comes from a section where John 8:44 is considered at some length [1261]. Here Edwards voices his esteem for Zanchius whom he accounts “the best of the protestant writers in his judgment, and likewise Suarez, the best of the schoolmen.” He inquires into their investigation of John 8:44 where, as he says, “Christ lays open both the devil’s sin and the sin of the Jews.” Outlining the rationale of these writers, Edwards says,

“The sin of the Jews was this, they would not receive that truth which Christ had delivered to them, as he tells them, ver. 45, “Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not;” and not receiving it, they sought to kill him. Now, if you ask what that truth was which Christ had so much inculcated upon them, you shall see, ver. 25, what it is. They asked him there, *Who he was*; “Even the same,” saith he, “that I have told you from the beginning, THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD. If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed,” ver. 36. This was the great truth that these Jews would not receive. Now he tells them, likewise, ver. 44, that Satan, their father, the devil, abode not in the truth. He was the first, saith he, that opposed and contradicted this great truth, and would not be subject to God who revealed this, nor would he accept, or embrace, or continue, or stand; he would quit heaven first; and so from hence come to be a murderer, a hater of this

²¹² Ibid., 607.

man Christ Jesus, and of this kingdom, and of mankind. For he that hateth God, or he that hateth Christ, he is, in what in him lieth, a murderer of him, and he showed it in falling upon man. And they [the exegetes] back it with this reason, why it should be so meant, because, otherwise the devil's sin which he compares them to, had not been so great as theirs. There had not been a likeness between the sin of the one and that of the other; his sin would have been only telling a lie, a lie merely in speech, and theirs had been a refusing that great truth, JESUS CHRIST IS THE MESSIAH AND HEAD; and so the devil's sin would have been less than theirs. Whereas he is made the great father of this great lie, of this great stubbornness to receive Christ, and to contradict this truth; and this, saith he, he hath opposed from the beginning with all his might, and he setteth your hearts at work to kill me.”²¹³

Interestingly, Edwards immediately follows this by writing, “But I say I will not stand upon this, because I only deliver it as that which is the opinion of some, and hath some probability.” For Edwards, his position rests primarily on the nature of God’s redemption and his peculiar exposition of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Nevertheless, the fact that he thinks this understanding of John 8 has some probability is telling.

A Critique

The problem I have with Edwards’ view can be divided chiefly into two main points. The first involves his handling of Ezekiel 28. The second focuses more on the explanatory power of his position in contradistinction to that of the one presented in this volume.

Let’s take the first point. In section [936], Edwards reflects at length on the typology of the king of Tyrus. He firmly believes that this human individual serves as a picture of Satan. With this I

²¹³ Ibid., 611.

agree. In the case of Edwards, however, he leans heavily on the details of the passage and draws a near one-to-one correlation with Lucifer, as if the text of Ezekiel directly illuminates the character, duties, and position of the angel. Hermeneutically speaking, this is tenuous at best, in my estimation. Not a few exegetes responsibly interpret the details of the passage in terms congruous with the historical context of the king of Tyrus. Some point back to Adam. For myself, I cannot say with confidence where I land. The passage is challenging. Nevertheless, Edwards's approach appears suspect.

Seemingly strange truths emerge as well, if one adopts Edwards' approach. For example, after exploring the phrase "anointed cherub" and the term "covereth," as it relates to the cherub, he writes,

"Hence learn that Satan before his fall was the *Messiah* or *Christ*, as he was the *anointed*. The word *anointed* is radically the same in Hebrew as the word *Messiah*: so that in this respect our Jesus is exalted into his place in heaven."²¹⁴

Edwards appears to believe that Lucifer was the highest of all angels and occupied a special, anointed position, the likes of which was forfeited after his fall and taken up by Jesus Christ Himself. This can be gathered by considering a couple of quotes. He writes,

"These things show another thing, wherein Jesus is exalted into the place of Lucifer; that whereas he had the honour to dwell in the holy of holies continually, so Jesus is there entered, not as the high priest of old, but to be there continually, but in this respect is exalted higher than Lucifer ever was..."²¹⁵

And again,

²¹⁴ Ibid., 609.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 609

“In another respect also Jesus succeeds Lucifer, *viz.* in being the *covering* cherub. The word translated *cover*, often and commonly signifies *to protect*. It was committed to this archangel especially, to have the care of protecting the beloved race, elect man, that was God’s jewel, his first-fruits, his precious treasure, laid up in God’s ark, or cabinet, hid in the secret of his presence. That was the great business the angels were made for, and therefore was especially committed to the head of the angels. But he fell from his innocence and dignity, and Jesus in his stead becomes the Cherub that covereth, the great Protector and Savior of elect man, that gathereth them as a hen her chickens under his wings.”²¹⁶

Unfortunately, Edwards doesn’t explain himself fully. One can certainly sense a larger network of theological assumptions at play. Edwards could illuminate the matter more fully by unpacking other ideas (such as the Angel of the Lord, Michael, and the tabernacle), but he doesn’t draw out the connections here. The text of Ezekiel 28 functions as a direct springboard to the past. As such, it leads Edwards to formulate his overall view in ways consonant with these details, so much so, perhaps, that if this pillar were removed, much would be lost. I’m tempted to say that the position would be irreparably damaged. Whether or to what degree this is the case, the interested reader will have to determine.

Regarding the explanatory power of his view, I think it suffers at a number of crucial points:

(1) If Satan first reacted negatively against God’s unveiling of His plan of redemption, how are we to explain his suddenly believing he could be like the Most High? What would be Satan’s rationale? And why would it be persuasive to other angels? Here Edwards is facing the same problem of the pride view, except that in the case of his perspective, conjecture is multiplied.

(2) In this respect, my view attempts to draw a much cleaner line between the ideals of the kingdom of darkness on earth and Satan’s original sin. We have seen that the strident autonomy of

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 609.

atheists, along with the impulse of pagan kings towards self-deification, provides a direct window to the past. If Edwards is correct, then his view doesn't sufficiently "get behind" the machinations of Lucifer. Basically, one is left saying that Satan, for whatever reason, rebelled against God's plan, and then, for whatever reason, chose to oppose God's kingdom by assuming the right and power of deity. Ockham's razor might prove useful here. This is doubly true if Ezekiel 28 doesn't provide Edwards with the peculiar information needed for his view.

(3) If my view more closely resembles the truth of the matter, it better explains how evil arose within the heart of Satan. Sin as a conceptual theory appeared to promise unexplored goods, if one were so inclined to misconstrue the data. If Edwards is correct, Satan's opposition to God's plan is hard to account for.

(4) Lastly, a sweeping consideration of the data, which cannot be reproduced in one short point, leads me away from Edwards' thesis. Time and again, autonomy and idolatry feature prominently, if not centrally, in the unfolding human drama. In the same way that Edwards looks at the peculiarities of Christ's incarnation and extrapolates backwards, I look at the overall thrust of history, the *Six Solas*, as it were, and extrapolate backwards to a different conclusion. The awful idea appears to be sin itself, not merely the unsavory reaction of one angel towards God's plan for humans.

But again, this is a matter of considerable judgment, and so I leave it to the reader to discern which, if either, more accurately represents the biblical data.

Appendix B

-Satan's Awful Idea and Theodicy-

If God knew that Lucifer was going to fall, why did He create him? The answer has been that God did it for His glory. That is the ultimate reason.

This is a heavy truth, an infinitely heavy truth, in fact, and if it doesn't cause a person to reflect, their heart isn't beating. Behind this answer lies an ocean of doctrine that not only overwhelms the human mind with wonder, but absorbs it with questions, even troubling questions. Chief among those, perhaps, is the question of suffering. Why set into motion a history that will result in so much unimaginable suffering, even eternal suffering? It's a jolting thought. And in response, someone will no doubt ask, "How could it be worth it? How could even God's glory justify this?"

This book, in one way or another, has touched upon the issue, seeking to provide a larger framework for understanding history. Nevertheless, much of what has been said has still been a grappling with the branches of the tree, so to speak. We are yet to drop to the ground and tunnel our way to the very root system itself, clear down to bedrock, that place where the shovel grows dull and one can dig no further; the place where the human mind stands on the very precipice of infinity, perceives the answer, and knows that it is very small. This is where we hear the LORD say, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isa 55:8-9).

When it comes to articulating an answer to this question, I know of no better voice than that of Jonathan Edwards. In a section dealing with the doctrine of God's eternal decree, Edwards provides a direct and imminently biblical response. If asked why God created Lucifer, knowing that the creature would fall and

introduce evil and all its bitter effects, Edwards would probably reply,

“It is a proper and excellent thing for infinite glory to shine forth; and for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God’s glory should be complete; that is, that all parts of his glory should shine forth, that every beauty should be proportionably effulgent, that the beholder may have a proper notion of God. It is not proper that one glory should be exceedingly manifested, and another not at all; for then the effulgence would not answer the reality. For the same reason it is not proper that one should be manifested exceedingly, and another but very little. It is highly proper that the effulgent glory of God should answer his real excellency; that the splendor should be answerable to the real and essential glory, for the same reason that it is proper and excellent for God to glorify himself at all. Thus it is necessary, that God’s awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested. But this could not be, unless sin and punishment had been decreed; so that the shining forth of God’s glory would be very imperfect, both because these parts of divine glory would not shine forth as the others do, and also the glory of his goodness, love, and holiness would be faint without them; nay, they could scarcely shine forth at all. If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God’s holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in his providence, of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God’s grace or true goodness, if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from. How much happiness soever he bestowed, his goodness would not be so much prized and admired, and the sense of it not so great, as we have elsewhere shown. We little consider how much the sense of good is heightened by the sense of evil, both moral and natural. And as it is necessary that there should be evil, because the display of the glory of God could not but be imperfect and incomplete without it, so evil is necessary, in order to the highest happiness of the creature,

and the completeness of that communication of God, for which he made the world; because the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and sense of his love. And if the knowledge of him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionably imperfect; and the happiness of the creature would be imperfect upon another account also; for, as we have said, the sense of good is comparatively dull and flat, without the knowledge of evil."²¹⁷

Rather than side skirt the issue by appealing to free will, which is the response of many (and which inevitably falls short), Edwards cuts right to the heart of the issue. The single greatest end, indeed, the greatest conceivable excellency (or good) in all of reality is none other than God's glory. There is no higher ideal. There is no greater treasure to treasure. If God were to ultimately magnify anything else other than that which is ultimately worthy of being esteemed and prized, God would be an idolater. He wouldn't want the best. Therefore, God's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Himself forever. This explains why the Scriptures are replete with statements detailing God's ambition to exalt His Name (Isaiah 43:6-7, 25; 48:9-11; Jeremiah 13:11, Psalm 25:11; Ezekiel 14:4, 17-18; 36:22-23, 23; 2 Kings 19:34, 20:6; 1 Samuel 12:20-22; 2 Samuel 7:23; 106:7-8, Romans 9:17; 11:36; Eph 1:4-6; 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11).

Wonderfully, this same passion for the magnification of His glory directly impacts our happiness. This is to say that God's glory does not stand in opposition to our joy. In fact, the two are essentially one. This is the point Edwards makes towards the end of the quote. Our happiness is intimately, even inextricably, bound up

²¹⁷ *Concerning the Divine Decrees*, section 10, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 2000), 528. For a profoundly helpful exposition of this theme, I would heartily recommend listening to John Piper's message *The Echo and Insufficiency of Hell, or, The Suffering of Christ and the Sovereignty of God*. Both can be found online at Desiring God. See also D.A. Carson's work, *How Long, O Lord?* for a biblically charged exposition of the theme of suffering. Lastly, John Frame in his work *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, provides a helpful overview and answer to the problem of evil.

with knowing and experiencing God. So in order to achieve this end, which will produce the greatest conceivable joy, God ordained the introduction of evil.²¹⁸

So far as our earthly pains and toils are concerned, which can be inexpressively horrific, they are, nevertheless, when viewed from the infinite peak of eternity, but a small drop in the ocean of time. This is why Paul can say,

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” ((2 Cor 4:17-18).

We may be able to better comprehend and endure the temporary afflictions of this present evil age, especially when weighed in the balance of God’s love and promises, but the fact of eternal suffering presents a weightier challenge. For those people who will not share in the eternal spring of God’s joy, but will be forever divorced from it, the situation is different. Here one is tempted to wonder if such means used for the magnification of God’s glory do not outweigh the goal. Nearly everyone can think of a close relative who does not know the Lord. Will their condemnation, even their just condemnation, serve to illuminate God’s glory? Yes, it will. But is that not too great a cost? Why not keep it from happening? Why not keep them from being born? Why create at all, given this outcome? Again, is the cost too great?

When all is said and done, there appears to be two fundamentally different ways of dealing with this admittedly challenging issue. One can respond in a way that smells remarkably similar to Satan’s awful idea, or not.

Let’s consider both.

²¹⁸ Here one might want to say “permitted” or “allowed,” which are certainly true and seek to preserve other important truths. Nevertheless, however one slices it, the end result is the same. God ordained it.

If someone objects to God's plan, urging that the magnification of His glory cannot justify actualizing the world and the history that has followed, this person is in effect saying, "I wouldn't do it this way, if I were in charge. I know this isn't the best way to run the universe. God's intentions and purposes aren't perfect. How could they be given such suffering?"

It should be noted that this is merely the awful idea rearing its ugly head again. It's self-deification creeping in. Not only is the objector claiming to know the beginning from the end, the grand tapestry in all its fullness, not to mention all mysteries, but he is claiming to know what is most valuable or ultimate, apart from God. He can supposedly see the big picture, weigh out all the variables, and correctly prize that which should be most prized. No mere creature can determine this, and to suppose otherwise is pure arrogance. Moreover, this implicitly, if not explicitly, de-cherishes the Most High. The objector wants to absolutize something else, which inevitably turns out to be his own conceptions. The objector deifies himself.

Here I am reminded of an exchange in the book *The Brothers Karamazov*. There's a powerful section where Ivan is questioning his pious Christian brother, Alyosha, about the problem of evil. I know of no more powerful presentation than the one leveled by Ivan. It is soul crushingly horrific. Ivan sketches out a number of heart wrenching scenarios, the most potent of which centers on a severely abused and neglected little girl. After presenting the atrocities to Alyosha, pressing them upon him for pages in the book, Alyosha finally cries out, "Why are you trying me? Will you say what you mean at last?"

Ivan responds with a searching question, "Tell me yourself, I challenge you—answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance— and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions! Tell me, and tell the truth."

Alyosha softly replies, “No, I wouldn’t consent.”

Ivan is acting the part of the great tempter, not only by calling God’s actions into question, but by subtly alluring Alyosha away by asking him to assume the place of God. “What would you do, if you were God?” is the tactic. But that’s just the point. We are not God! Indeed, we *cannot* be God. We fall hopelessly (infinitely!) short. And to think otherwise is simply to fall into the trap of the Evil One.²¹⁹

There is another way to approach this issue, a more faithful and God honoring way. It is to admit that this is a difficult doctrine to comprehend, and that God will do what is perfectly right and good (Gen 18:25). Along these lines, it’s important to remember that this issue isn’t unlike the choice to eat of the forbidden fruit in the Garden; or like Job who couldn’t comprehend his tragedies; or the angels who surely wondered how God could be both just and the justifier of the wicked; or Abraham when he was told to sacrifice the child of promise; or the OT saints who wondered why the Messiah continued to tarry; or Peter when he heard that one must drink the blood and eat the flesh of Christ in order to obtain eternal life; or the confusion of the disciples when Christ was crucified like a criminal. The unfolding story has long presented, and continues to present, emotionally and intellectually challenging hurdles. But God has also shown time and again that He is good and can be trusted. He knows how to solve problems that appear to be impossibilities. The cross is the supreme truth of this.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Where does such a question end? Would you allow 9-11 to happen? Would you allow your aunt to get cancer? Would you have confused the tongues of men at the tower of Babel? Perhaps you would forgive everyone (demons included) by divine fiat (never mind justice), hand out lollipops and invite everyone to dance in a big circle? Where does it end? It doesn’t. Every last square inch of reality will be called into question by some person or another. Each will think they know what is best.

²²⁰ John Frame, writes, “If God could vindicate his justice and mercy in a situation where such vindication seemed impossible, if he could vindicate them in a way that went far beyond our expectations and understanding, can we not trust him to vindicate himself again? If God is able to provide an answer to the exceptionally difficult Old Testament form of the problem of evil, does it not

As children of God, we must recognize that we are just that. We are children. And children do not always understand the ways of their father. We presently see in a mirror darkly. Someday the larger panorama will be pulled back more fully, the books will be opened, and we will see God. We will understand more later. Until then, we must walk by faith, just like those who have gone before us.

It is interesting to note that in the book of Revelation, when the culmination of God's plan unfolds with radiant glory, there is going to be an eruption of singing from both angels and glorified saints. The lyrics are telling and prove instructive. Listen again to the song,

"Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed" (Rev 15:3-4; see also 16:5-7; 19:1-2).

Notice what they say. They proclaim, "Just and true are your ways." While this passage doesn't directly answer the question at hand, it clearly shows that the essence of the problem will be washed away. The consummation will reveal something that not only dispels doubt, but elicits praise and instills certainty. God's goodness will be perfectly vindicated. No one will fail to glorify the Lord out of genuine appreciation. His holiness will shine forth in a way that we simply cannot presently comprehend. There are factors that we simply do not see or presently understand.

So our choice is really twofold, given Edwards' position. We can either walk by faith or we can shift towards the awful idea. For those Christians who might be tempted to spurn the ultimate

make sense to assume that he can and will answer our remaining difficulties? Does it not make sense to trust and obey, even in the midst of suffering?" *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1994), 184.

purposes of God, I would like to remind them of the words of Job. He said,

“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:3-6, NIV).

