

*The doctrine of man is essential not only in understanding who we are and why God made us, but as the dark backdrop on which the doctrine of salvation shines brightly. We must grapple with the bad news of man if we are to embrace the good news of Jesus. So, get to know yourself in these pages that you might know God even greater.*

Leroy Community Chapel Statement of Faith – Article III

**“We believe that man was created in the image of God; that man rejected God and as a result of this rebellion (referred to as The Fall) was separated from God and was placed under the condemnation of death; and that the entire human race shares in man’s lost condition.”**

Historic Church Documents

*These creedal documents all seek to bring clarity to the issue of man as a sinner. Frankly, while I can appreciate the minutia of the differences on how mankind was affected by the fall, I find it mostly laborious and rather intramural. Bottom line for me, man is a sinner by nature and by action, unable to do anything to fix his sin problem, therefore utterly dependant on the work of God to rescue him, but read on ...*

- Council of Orange (529)

“If anyone denies that it is the whole man, that is, both body and soul, that was "changed for the worse" through the offense of Adam's sin, but believes that the freedom of the soul remains unimpaired and that only the body is subject to corruption, he is deceived by the error of Pelagius and contradicts the scripture which says, "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:20); and, "Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are the slaves of the one whom you obey?" (Rom. 6:16); and, "For whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved" (2 Pet. 2:19)." [Canon I]

“If anyone asserts that Adam's sin affected him alone and not his descendants also, or at least if he declares that it is only the death of the body which is the punishment for sin, and not also that sin, which is the death of the soul, passed through one man to the whole human race, he does injustice to God and contradicts the Apostle, who says, "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom. 5:12)." [Canon II]

- Canons of Dordt (1618)

“Since all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death, God would have done no one an injustice if it had been his will to leave the entire human race in sin and under the curse, and to condemn them on account of their sin. As the apostle says: The whole world is liable to the condemnation of God (Rom. 3:19), All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23)." [Article I]

- Westminster Confession (1646)

“After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures." [Chapter IV, Article II]

“Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptations of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion, with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary

generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions. This corruption of nature, during this life, does remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, does in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal." [Chapter VI, Articles I-VI]

### Key Terms & Definitions

**Imago Dei** This is the Latin phrase meaning “image of God” and I use it here for two reasons, (1) You may hear it and wonder what it means, and (2) It’s a cool term and makes me feel smart that I know some Latin. The subject of man made in the image of God is quite important, and before talking about the sin of man, we must firmly grasp this concept of being made in God’s image. In Genesis 1 it is obvious that the creation of man is the highpoint of creation, and that man is different from all the other created things. He has been made in the “image” or “likeness” of the Godhead. And while much theological debate has gone on over the years as to just what that means, the basic concept is that man was created to represent God. When people see the great works of art man can create, the stellar athletic ability man has, the score of music an orchestra can play, the heroic acts of compassion man can perform, the tender care of a mother to a child, the skillful hands of a carpenter (you get the picture), we *should* say, “WOW, what a glorious God that created men and women with such beautiful skills.” In this sense, mankind is capable of some pretty amazing things that fish and dogs aren’t capable of, and that is because God made man “in His image”. This then becomes the foundation to say that *all* people are valuable in the sight of God and should be viewed that way by us.

**The Fall of Man** This phrase refers to the account in Genesis 3 where the serpent deceived Eve, and she in turn gave some to her husband Adam and he willingly ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They had disobeyed God, choosing to go their own way, and the result was the fall of man. Man had willfully fallen into sin and away from God. The remainder of the Bible, from Genesis 3 on, is God plan for rescuing and restoring what was lost here in Eden.

**Original Sin** This term, while simple to read, is often confused with a number of events. You might think that the original sin was the angel Lucifer deciding he wanted to be worshipped rather than to worship God, or you might think it was Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden eating the fruit, and technically you’d be wrong. The term is used to describe the *state* of mankind as a result of the sin of Adam. It is original in that it came from Adam, and it is original in that we all have it from birth. That is to say, all of mankind is born with a sin nature because of the fall of man.

**Imputed Guilt** This term is used in the discussion of original sin to describe how Adam’s guilt is counted (imputed) to us and every person ever born. Obviously, we were not there in the Garden of Eden, but Adam represented the whole human race, and so when he sinned, we all inherited his guilt and the ensuing corruption of the human race. I will explain this further in the section on key Bible texts (Romans 5:12-21).

**Total Depravity** This term is often used to describe the state of man in his sin and in

need of rescue. Man is in bondage to sin and unable to do anything to come to God on his own. Please remember here, the doctrine of Imago Dei, and that man (even unbelieving man) can do good things, but nothing that is good enough to deal with the problem of sin in their soul. And while man is not always as bad as his sinful heart could be, and not everyone is an Adolph Hitler in disguise, in the flesh he cannot please God (Romans 8:8) and even his “righteous deeds are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). This is crucial to understand at this stage in our development of the doctrine of man, because it is against this backdrop that the doctrine of salvation appears most glorious in God’s rescue of sinful, depraved man!

**Pelagius** I’ll give you one name this week because his name comes up anytime you read theology on this subject. His name is Pelagius and he was a teacher in Rome around the year 400. He taught that God only holds man responsible for those things he is *able to do*. He rejected original sin and the imputation of guilt from Adam, and held that sin only consists in the actual sinful acts. And while this sounds more pleasing to the ear and “fairer” for men, it contradicts numerous passages in Scripture that we are born in sin, guilty before God, and unable to please God. On the other side of the debate was Augustine, and over the years there have been plenty of positions offered everywhere in between. Again, the crucial piece being every man is in bondage to sin and unable to do anything about it outside the work of Christ and God’s gracious acting.

#### Foundational Biblical Data

**Genesis 1:26-27 (see also James 3:9) “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them”**

We looked at these verses in Genesis last week related to the doctrine of the Trinity already being opened up for us to see in the first chapter of the Bible, and here we take a look at it to observe how the triune Godhead created man – “in his own image.” Let’s take note of a few things here.

(1) Mankind is the highpoint of creation. On the other days of creation God observed all that He had made and “saw that it was good”, but after the creation of man He beholds that it “was very good.” Only after mankind has been created is creation complete and God completely satisfied in what He has made.

(2) Therefore, it is significant to note that the “*very good-ness*” of the creation of man over the animals is because man has been created “in the likeness” of God. Much ink has been spilled over the two words “likeness” and “image” and I think it’s best to understand them as synonyms. So, here there is obviously something unique and wonderful about man created in the image of God

(3) Just what is it? While man cannot model all the attributes or characteristics of the Godhead, man comes the closest to representing God on earth. A dog can’t show compassion, and while the moon points to a Creator, it can’t speak of the love of Jesus. Mankind alone has been made in the image of God and has been designed to display and declare His excellencies. [I believe unregenerate men display some of the excellencies of God without knowing it or attributing what they do to their Creator.]

(4) So then, I believe this truth of the Imago Dei becomes a greater foundation than the Declaration of Independence for the equality and value of all mankind. All men are

created equal and are endowed with their Creator the image of God and that makes them all valuable before God and men, regardless of ethnicity, culture, language, education, perceived value to society, etc.

**Jeremiah 17:9; Ephesians 2:3 “the heart is deceitful above all things ... we are by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind”**

Okay, so firmly tuck away the truth of all men being made in the “image of God” and now add to that what the prophet Jeremiah teaches and the apostle Paul affirms about all mankind being by nature children of wrath with a deceitful heart. Ouch! But I’m a good guy you say. I have no doubt about that (well, maybe with some of you ) but in all your goodness you have a heart separated from God as a result of sin. I haven’t done any *big* sins you say. Okay, maybe not, but you have acted selfishly, told a lie, hurt someone with your words, lusted, or coveted what someone else had. What does that make you? A good guy with an imperfect heart ... really friend, it’s not just you, so don’t take it personally, it all mankind. No one can think, act, or speak perfectly as God requires ... that why we need the only perfect substitute taking the penalty for our sin – Jesus Christ. Sorry, got preaching there ... back to the text.

The Bible teaches quite clearly in these two passages that man’s heart is opposed to God by nature. His heart is bent on self and not God. Not all men act as outwardly wicked as their heart inwardly is, but they are children of wrath nonetheless. All mankind is plagued with this disease called sin, and with sin comes death – spiritual separation from God now and ultimate spiritual and physical separation from God eternally.

**Psalms 14:3; Romans 3:9-10 “there is none who do good ... none is righteous ... no one seeks for God”**

Just a few more passages the both show you how pervasive and total the sin problem is across all the human race, and that it’s not merely some obscure doctrine in Scripture. But here in these two passages we see not just a deceitful heart, but action that now flows from that heart. Understand the “none who do good” as none who are able to do anything with purely righteous motivation in any meritorious way (gaining greater standing before God). The deceitful-hearted children of wrath do not seek after God nor do they possess righteousness in and of themselves. This is a problem!

**Romans 5:19 (see also 1 Corinthians 15:22) “by the disobedience of one the many were made sinners”**

This section in the book of Romans is a key passage related to how all mankind were affected by the sin of Adam, and verse 19 is the pivot point of the text. Paul teaches that one man represented the whole human race and therefore all are guilty based on our father Adam. The verb “many were made” indicates a completed past action. In other words, when Adam sinned all who would descend from Adam were made sinners. Fair? No, not really, but neither is it fair that one man’s obedience (which we didn’t do either) could bring about righteousness and forgiveness. But we’ll get to that in the next few weeks. For now, understand the text to teach that sin began in the Garden and all

mankind was represented in Adam, thus becoming a fallen human race in need of rescue.

**Romans 8:22-23 “we wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies”**

From the Fall on, the world and all it contains, began the process of decay. Paul makes it clear in Romans 8:18-25 that we all wait (creation included) for the final and full redemption and rescue from this decay. All around us we see death, we see deterioration, we see the effects of sin. Being “green” is a good thing, we are to be stewards of the planet, but it’s not going to reverse the fall or restore us to Eden, only God’s full and final rescue will. The cross redeems our souls from spiritual death, restores us to our Father, but it is still appointed unto men once to die, and nothing overrides that but for the full and final rescue of God. All creation knows there is something more, and it groans. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ know there is something more, and we groan. God has rescued us, and He will yet rescue us!

Frequently Asked Questions

1- Why did God create man?

God created man for His own glory! He did not create us because He lacked anything, but He created us so that we could display and declare His glory and share in the joy of relationship with Him. That in and of itself brings purpose to life. We were created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever! We answered one of the most basic questions last week: Who is God? And we ask and answer another this week: What is man? Our answer – Man is a created being made in the image of God to glorify his Creator and walk in the joy of knowing Him. Are you enjoying Him as you were created to do?

2- So is man basically good, or basically bad?

This is perhaps the hardest piece of Bible truth for good unbelieving people to swallow. Over the years I have found the most common answer from people as to why they see no need for the work of Christ is that they are “good”. This becomes tricky in responding, because if you hit that head on and tell them they aren’t, you probably just shut the door having offended them calling them evil. Or you begin to establish and unfold the standard God has put forth which not a single person has achieved. Then once someone is willing to acknowledge that even in their “goodness” they still sin, it is easier to introduce the subject of inherited sin. Theologian Millard Erickson writes, *Sin is not merely wrong acts and thoughts, but sinfulness as well, an inherent inner disposition inclining us to wrong acts and thoughts. We are not simply sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.* It’s the plague of the human race and there is no remedy apart from Christ. So is man basically good? No. But please handle gently. Remember the image of God and that there are “good people” out there, but they are still in desperate need of God, His righteousness, and the only perfect sacrifice for sin – Jesus.

3- But it doesn’t seem fair that everyone inherits sin when it was Adam’s fault?

Fairness is a tricky thing, because every time you scream “foul” in one direction, you

welcome “grace” from the other direction. One team thinks the referee got it wrong, the other think he got it right. My point? The minute you say its not fair that we inherited the guilt and corruption of Adam, you are also saying it’s not fair that you can have the righteousness of Christ imputed to you through the cross. Guess what? From a human standpoint, the cross isn’t just. Condemned sinners with desperately wicked hearts should get the full weight of the wrath of God poured out on them, but what we get is grace ... unmerited, free, lavish grace! I believe this idea of fairness and man’s unwillingness to embrace his fallen state is one of the greatest lies of Satan. I think Martin Luther does too, listen to what he says, *The most damnable and pernicious heresy that has ever plagued the mind of man was the idea that somehow he could make himself good enough to deserve to live with an all-holy God.* My friend, as good as you may be, you’re not good enough and your only hope for rescue is Jesus Christ and His goodness freely given to you.

4- You mean my cute little baby is a sinner?

I wish you hadn’t asked this question ... oh wait, I asked it. This is a hard one, an emotionally charged one, and one the Bible’s rather silent on. Oh, we appeal to various passages, but the reality is that we are trusting the heart of God on this one more than explicit Bible texts. I’ll start with a quote from Tedd Tripp, *Even a child in the womb and coming from the womb is wayward and sinful. We often are taught that man becomes a sinner when he sins. The Bible teaches that man sins because he is a sinner. Your children are never morally neutral, not even from the womb.* I agree, this is the doctrine of imputed guilt that we’ve now seen taught in the Scriptures. Some would argue that’s why you baptize infants, including them in the covenant people of God protected through their identity in the community of faith even before they are able to make a profession of faith. Some would argue that there must be an age of accountability and up to that point/age/condition all get a free pass to heaven outside of faith in Christ. Others even would argue that the elect are the elect and so if God chose that baby, then they’re in, if not, so sorry. Not only does each of these pose their own theological problems, but the Scriptural basis for these is sketchy and forced at best. So, where do I land?

There are a number of Scriptural references to God working in the heart of an infant (John the Baptist – Luke 1:15 / David – Psalm 22:9-10; 139:13-16 / Jeremiah – Jeremiah 1:5 / Paul – Galatians 1:15). And a few other Scriptural references to the belief that when an infant dies he is at rest and in a better place (Job wishing to have been stillborn – Job 3:11-19; David’s confidence that he will see his dead child – 2 Samuel 12:13-23). So what can we say about the little ones? Simply, we don’t know. There is only one way to the Father, and that is through the person and work of the Son. All have sinned ... all fall short of God’s righteous standard ... and are under the wrath of God. We want clear categories and nice boxes, but in this case, we don’t have them. We are called to trust the *mercy* of God and rest in who we know our God to be. As parents there is no religious ritual we can do to make ourselves feel safer or better about our little ones, our focus must always be the teaching of the Gospel to our children and the worship of a sovereign and wise God.

## 5- What about a Christian who sins?

The rescue of God that comes through the cross and one's repenting and responding to the Gospel does not bring about perfection (yet). Hebrews 3:12-13 clearly show that even believers are subject to spiritual blindness, that is to say, make choices more in line with the flesh than the Spirit. That means that until God's full and final rescue (His return and our glorification), we still live with the fallen body and the sinful flesh. The difference now for followers of Christ is that we are no longer slaves to sin, and we have had all our sin (past, present, future) paid for in Christ. So Christian, you will still struggle with sin, but your sin no longer weighs you down to the pit of hell. Ed Welch summarizes this well, "*Sinner*" is a present-tense description of everyone, including those who have put their faith in Christ. Of course, those who have called Jesus "Lord" are justified, meaning that they are no longer guilty. Also, they have been given the Spirit, which makes them slaves to Christ rather than to sin. But we all are sinners. Perfection awaits eternity. So fight sin with all your might, but know that it is already a defeated foe.

### What Do I Do With This?

#### **In My Head**

Don't go too long without dwelling on the doctrine of sin. If you're not careful you will slide into the commonly held worldview that man is basically good, but God (or the higher power of your choice) might make you better. This is just not true. And if you don't hold firmly to the doctrine of man and his imputed sin and guilt you will diminish the glory of the cross. God sent His Son into the world to save sinners, not help good people get a little better!

#### **In My Heart**

Don't run to one extreme or the other. Don't play the "woe is me" game, nor triumphantly declare your goodness. Start with the reality of your fallenness, don't so quickly trust your own judgment, and be quick to look to your own heart first. Live with an ever-present eye to who you were and who you would be without Christ ... and live in brokenness. But don't wallow in the worm-world! Confidently and courageously move forward with the victory Christ has won for you. But please friend, make sure He has indeed won it for you and that you have indeed repented of your sin and turned to Christ ... and then never stop repenting. It's amazing what joy repentance can bring when you have this proper Biblical perspective.

### For Further Study

Created in God's Image. Anthony A. Hoekema. Eerdmans. 1986.

The Imputation of Adam's Sin. John Murray. Eerdmans. 1959.

Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate. Jerry Bridges. NavPress. 2007.

Brokenness: The Heart God Revives. Nancy Leigh DeMoss. Moody. 2005.

*For Family Discipleship*

**Questions for Discussion**

- (1) What simple, true statements can you make about who man is?
- (2) Why do you sin?
- (3) What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

**Memory Verse**

*“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”*

– Romans 5:19

**Song**

In Your hands lies each step I take  
You’re not surprised by mistakes I make,  
But You have known me through and through  
And still You call me friend.

[Chorus]

You know the number of hairs on my head,  
You know the sparrow that falls to the ground,  
You know my day before it has begun  
Father, You know everything.

**A Catechism for Young Children**

Q. Why did God make you?

A. For His own glory.

Q. How can you glorify God?

A. By loving Him and doing what He commands.

Q. What effect had the sin of Adam on all mankind?

A. All mankind are born in a state of sin and misery.