

*Chicken Bones*  
*of*  
*Christian*  
*Thought*



*Jim Fowler*



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# **CHICKEN BONES OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT**

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Bible Study Group of Binghamton, New York that sponsors the annual Dan Stone Memorial Conference in Dalton, Pennsylvania. They have faithfully hosted this conference on Memorial Day weekend for twenty-seven years now.

A special word of appreciation goes to Mr. Don Frantz and his dear wife, Riss, for taking the lead in organizing the many details of this annual teaching conference.

It has been my privilege and pleasure to attend and speak at this conference for the past thirteen years. Many of the participants at the conferences have attended year after year for many years. What a blessing it has been to forge long-lasting relationships with these brothers and sisters in Christ, whom I now count as close friends.

The content of this book was developed for and delivered to those who attended the Dan Stone Memorial Teaching Conference in May, 2011 at the Saint Pius X Seminary and Retreat Center in Dalton, PA. Thank you for your kind and gracious receptivity to my teaching.

Jim Fowler  
2011



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
The Antinomy of Evil .....	11
The Absurdity of Human Sin .....	19
The Dilemma of the Fall of Humanity.....	29
The Paradox of the God-man.....	39
The Scandal of the Cross .....	49
The Offense of Faith .....	59
The Mystery of Participation in God .....	69
The Enigma of the Christian Life .....	79
Conclusion .....	89





## INTRODUCTION

In 1993 two motivational gurus, Mark Hansen and Jack Canfield, joined together to publish a book. That book, entitled *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, became a #1 best seller on the *New York Times* and *USA Today* book lists, selling millions of copies. Their combined efforts mushroomed into a marketing enterprise that has included several hundred *Chicken Soup* book titles, and a great variety of *Chicken Soup* products including calendars, coffee mugs, CDs, greeting cards, games, toys, puzzles, clothing, and even pet food.

The *Chicken Soup* theme of this successful enterprise was chosen because Jack Canfield remembered his grandmother's kind-intentioned belief that chicken soup could heal almost anything that ails you. I, too, remember that when my siblings and I did not feel well – when we had a tummy-ache, or what have you – my mother always advised the remedy of Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup and saltine crackers. It was warm. It went down easy. It was very palatable. It made you feel good, even if it might not have had any curative benefit.

The registered *Chicken Soup* product line is based on short inspirational stories and quotations that are predominantly light-hearted, uplifting, heart-warming, morally-supportive, positive-thinking, problem-solving, and life-encouraging – and they can also be side-splitting humorous or tear-jerking emotional. The promotion of the *Chicken Soup* line of products has been

successful because the stories are very palatable; they go down easy; they make you feel good; they are inspirational and comforting.

The Chicken Soup Corp. has made every effort to apply their *Chicken Soup* philosophy to every facet of people's lives. Just listen to some of the emphases in their multitudinous book titles:

*Chicken Soup* for moms, dads, grandparents, preteens, teenagers, middle-school students, high school students, college students, newlyweds, moms-to-be, and those in menopause. Then there are *Chicken Soup* stories for chocolate lovers, coffee lovers, tea lovers, and wine lovers. There is also *Chicken Soup* inspiration for golfers, fishermen, runners, baseball fans, basketball fans, and NASCAR enthusiasts. To these we must add *Chicken Soup* inspiration books for teachers, twins, those facing cancer, for Christian kids, for nurses, nature lovers, prisoners, and for those involved in divorce or recovery. There is *Chicken Soup* for the African-American soul, the Canadian soul, the Jewish soul, the LDS soul, the Catholic soul, the Latino soul, the Hawaiian soul, the bride's soul, the dieter's soul, the beach-lover's soul, the gardener's soul, the shopper's soul, the scrap-booker's soul, the romantic soul, the traveler's soul, the veteran's soul, and the dreamer's soul. To those we must add *Christian Soup* for those who love Christmas, those who believe in miracles, those who like country music, those who want to know the story behind the song, those who are positive thinkers, and those who want to re-shape the new you. Those are just a sampling, for the list of *Chicken Soup* books goes on and on.....

Those of you who know me, and have listened to my teaching for a number of years now, or tried to read my

writings, are quite aware that I am not really a *Chicken Soup* kind of fellow. I am not one who tells a lot of inspirational stories; nor do I use many uplifting illustrations. I am not a story-artist – I am a thought-mechanic.

So, instead of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, I have chosen to consider “*The Chicken Bones of Christian Thought*.” I will advise you at the outset that these chicken bones are hard to swallow. They do not “go down easy,” but rather often get stuck in people’s throats. They cause people to choke. They are not encouragingly entertaining, but are often persistently perplexing. Instead of inspirational comfort, they often produce increasingly agitating consternation. Instead of being heart-warming, they tend to be mind-numbing. Instead of being light-hearted fluff, they tend to be heavy theological stuff!

So, this entire introduction about *Chicken Soup for the Soul* was just to provide a contrastual *dissimilarity* to the series of thoughts that I have chosen to share – which, as mentioned, I have entitled, “*The Chicken Bones of Christian Thought*.”

In the theological progression of Christian thought there are certain junctures that are logical sticking points where human reason gets stuck in the *non-sequiturs*, the paradoxes, the dialectic tensions, the conundrums and the contradictions. Through the prophet Isaiah, God informed us, “His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways His ways” (Isa. 55:8,9). His ways are “unfathomable” – “past finding out” (Rom. 11:33). And in our human attempts to figure out and

explain God's unfathomable ways our thought processes get bound up in the quandaries of incongruities and inscrutabilities.

Sometimes Christian people seem to think that the Christian faith is so logical, that if it were just presented more adequately and persuasively any reasonable person would accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and become a Christian. I used to think that way! I used to think that Christianity was a belief-system more reasonable than any other that could be apologetically defended in the court of rational discourse, with the just and conclusive verdict being that any rational person should assent to the proven facts of the Christian gospel. But I came to realize, *first*, Christianity is not a belief-system of factual data to be assimilated. And, *second*, that the factual data that underlies Christian thought is fraught with a series of logical "stumbling-blocks" that are not easy to overcome. And, *third*, that the process of *becoming* a Christian, and *being* the Christian one has become, is precariously prone to uncertainty.

There is so much about Christian thought that just doesn't stand to reason. It flunks the logic tests of human thought. To many reasonable people it is patently ridiculous, if not absolutely absurd, and these are legitimate and understandable reactions to the gospel.

Let me share with you where I am going with the selected theme of "The Chicken Bones of Christian Thought:" The outline looks like this:

1. The Antinomy of Evil
2. The Absurdity of Human Sin
3. The Dilemma of Fallen Humanity
4. The Paradox of the God-man
5. The Scandal of the Cross
6. The Offense of Faith
7. The Mystery of Participation in Christ
8. The Enigma of the Christian Life

Our objective is not to figure these out with air-tight reasonable explanation – that is an exercise in futility. I seek only to identify the logical *non sequiturs*, and to admit that these are indeed contrary to logical human thought and they do tend to get stuck like “chicken bones” in the throats (in the craw) of those attempting to understand Christian thought from a natural perspective.

But let it be stated here at the outset, that Christian thought does not have to justify itself by the criterion of human reason. The revelation of God in Christ carries with it implicitly its own internal and spiritual coherence – Divine Theo-logic – that cannot be assimilated by human reason – only received by faith, as we venture and entrust ourselves, our total being and lives, on (into) the reality of the Christ-life.

This entire study was sparked by the apostle Paul’s extended argument in I Corinthians 1:18–2:16. Paul explained to his Corinthians readers 1) what he shared with them; what he said; what he preached. 2) In the process he explained that not everyone understood, or accepted, or even appreciated what he had to say. 3) But regardless, he does not shrink back from what he said,

or try to engage them on their playing field. He just glories in the power and wisdom of God in Jesus Christ, and what he “knows” by way of the Spirit.

What he **said**:

“preach the gospel” – I Cor. 1:17

“we preach Christ crucified” – I Cor. 1:23

“testimony of the Lord” – I Cor. 2:1

“Jesus Christ and Him crucified” – I Cor. 2:2

“we speak wisdom not of this world” – I Cor. 2:6

“speak the things of the Spirit” – I Cor. 2:13

What they **thought** about what he **said**:

“foolishness” – I Cor. 1:18

Jews seek signs–1:22; Gentiles seek wisdom-1:22

Jews – stumblingblock; Gentiles – foolishness

I Cor. 1:23

People of world can’t understand– I Cor. 2:8,9

Natural man cannot understand things of Spirit –

I Cor. 2:14

“foolishness” – 2:14

How did he **respond** to what they **thought** about what he **said**?

We believe in the power of God – I Cor. 1:18

Christ the power and the wisdom of God – 1:25

We are “called of God” – 1:26

We are “in Christ Jesus” –

He is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification”

“we glory in the Lord” – 1:31

“our faith stands in the power of God” – 2:5

“we speak a wisdom not of this world” – 2:6  
“we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery ...  
hidden ...foreordained...2:7  
“God has revealed the deep things of God  
through the Spirit” – 2:10  
“the things of God are known by the Spirit of  
God” – 2:11  
“we received the Spirit from God to know things  
given by God – 2:12  
“we have mind of Christ” -2:16

Paul does not try to employ (or enter into) their rational argumentation or their clever rhetoric. He tried that once when he first came to Athens, and quickly concluded it was an exercise in futility. He does not try to play the game on their playing field – the field of human reason. He just stands firm in what he knows – or rather, just rests in Who he knows, rather unaffected, ambivalent to their inability to comprehend. He knows why they can’t “get it;” why they cannot grasp with their minds what God has done and is doing.

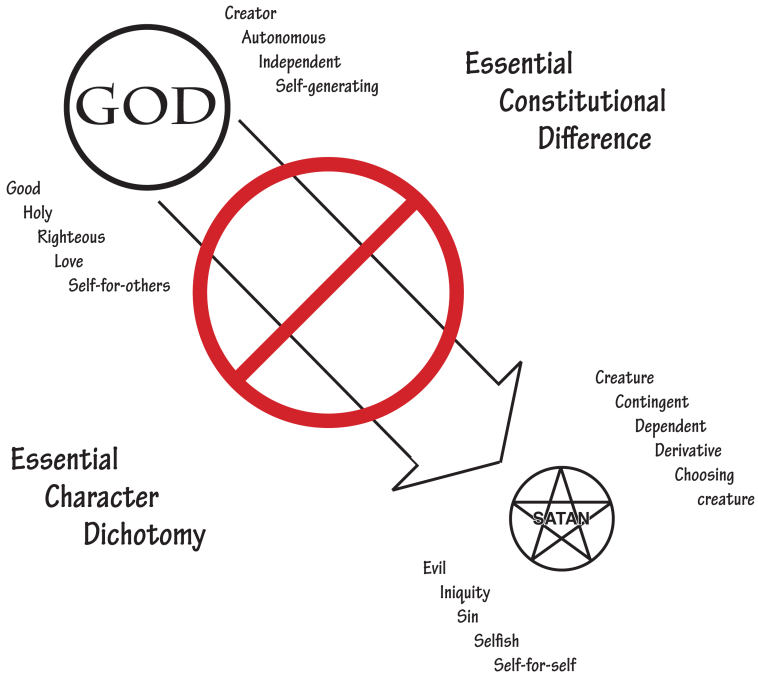
So using Paul’s outline, we will look at each of the 8 topics before us:

1. We will first consider what we (at least what I) say about these topics,
2. Then briefly consider what the natural man using human reason alone often thinks about what we have to say,
3. Then (in the conclusion) we will consider how we might respond to how the rational world around us thinks about what we have to say.





# The Antinomy of Evil





# 1

## The Antinomy of Evil

The question: If God is good, and all-powerful, and as the Creator is the essential cause of all things, then why is there evil in this good world which the good God created, and declared to be “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

The question takes us into the realm of *theology* proper – the study of God and His attributes, and also to the study of *theodicy* – trying to explain how evil originated in the creation that the righteous God created.

### What we say:

God is the Creator – the essential cause of all things, but never the blameworthy or culpable cause of anything that is contrary to His own Being or character. He DOES what He DOES, because He IS Who He IS, and He does so *ek autos*, out of Himself, expressing Himself in total consistency with Himself. God acts autonomously and independently, without oversight or authority from any other. God alone has “Free-will” – the inherent ability to Self-determine what He will do in the consistent expression of His own Being and character, and the intrinsic power to implement His own Self-determination in the Self-generating authority and power of His own Being.

In that process the Creator God created creatures who were not like Him constitutionally. They were not “little gods,” nor were they intended to become “gods,” much less God. These creatures were both angelic and human – but we will begin with the consideration of the angelic, for they were created prior to humanity. These angelic creatures that God created (and we are given very limited biblical information about their primordial creation and function) were created with an “essential constitutional difference” from God. Whereas God is the Creator, they were angelic creatures. Whereas God is autonomous and independent; the angelic creatures were contingent and dependent upon their Creator, God. Whereas God is Self-determinatively Self-generative in all His action; the angelic creatures were derivative, meant to derive all from God. Whereas God always acts out of His own absolute Free-will, the angelic creatures were choosing creatures, intended and able to choose to derive from God (*ek Theos* – “out of God”) in their function as dependent and contingent creatures. To allow such choosing creatures to make choices with genuine consequences, God Self-limited Himself (as only He can do), determining not to impose His absolute, sovereign power upon His creatures, but allowing creaturely choices to have consequences even in their relationship to Him.

The angelic “light-bearer,” Lucifer, leading the host of angelic creatures, was designed to willingly choose to derive from God’s Light, and to bear that Divine Light, and goodness, and holiness, and Love as a self-for-others, glorifying God and interacting with other angelic beings in the interpersonal loving unity of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The very character of

God was to flow by His Grace-action through Lucifer and the angelic community to the glory of God.

But somehow – and it’s an antinomy that defies all human reasoning (antinomy is derived from *anti*=against, and *nomos*=law, and simply means “against the law of reason”). Against the law of rational understanding, this head of the angelic realm, Lucifer, being a creature with freedom of choice, chooses to defy God and “go it alone.” But how can he do that? He is a derivative, contingent creature of God, designed to function *ek Theos* – “out of God”. From whence did he derive that self-orientation, that self-oriented determination to defy God, to become a self-for-self, to set himself up as the antithesis of God, to be the negative of God’s positive, to be the originating source of evil and iniquity and sin contrary to the character of God. How could he do that? How is that possible? He was incapable of functioning *ek autos* (“out of himself”), for that is God’s prerogative alone!

The origin of evil is definitely an “antinomy” (against the law of reason) – the ultimate incongruity that defies human understanding. But, somehow or other, Lucifer, the foremost of the angels, employed his creaturely freedom of choice to choose against God and to become Satan, the adversary of God, the spiritual originating source of an “essential character dichotomy” contrasted with the character of God – the source of all evil, iniquity, sin and selfishness.

Who/what did Lucifer derive from? We do not know! Did he act autonomously and independently, so as to

self-generate and recreate himself as Satan (*ek autos*–“out of himself”)? Logically impossible!

But the biblical record in Isaiah 14 indicates that he declared, “I will ascend into heaven, and exalt **my** throne above the stars of God... I will make **myself** like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13,14). From this position of ego-centricity (Satan is the **I**-specialist), he became the destructive *diabolos*, who “throws himself through” the intents of God, and “makes crooked the straight ways of God” (Acts 13:10) as the “crooked serpent” (Isa. 27:1).

Logically it is probably best to indicate that the adversarial creature, Satan, still derives from God (ultimately), but takes that which is of God and twists, contorts, distorts, and aborts what God intends, in order to make it come out contrary to God’s character and intent. Yet, this entire perspective of the origination of evil can still be viewed within the context of God’s infinite Will and Plan, for there is the logical necessity of having an antithetical spiritual source of derivation to allow the derivative freedom of choice within humanity to have a genuine alternative from whence to choose to derive.

**What the wisdom of the world thinks of what we say:**

The natural man utilizing the “wisdom of the world” responds to such an explanation by saying: “You haven’t answered the question. You seem to “beg the question. You have admitted that it is not logical, that it is an antinomy, “against the law of reason,” and such human

reasoning is the only criteria that we are willing to utilize to answer the question.”

It doesn't make sense. It's non-sense! That a God-figure who is alleged to be all-powerful and absolutely good should purpose or allow an evil figure and force into His universe, an antithetical power that destroys what is alleged to be perfect – that is totally incongruous.

The “wisdom of this world” will necessarily reject the argument just have made for the origin of evil. The atheists are not willing to accept the initial premise of the eternal presence of God. The theists, though they posit the premise of God, will have various objections:

There are some, like the Christian Science group, who think that evil is an illusion – it doesn't really exist, but is an erroneous concept in the human mind.

Others, following Augustine in the fourth century, want to use the argument of privation, and explain that evil is just the absence of good. This only leads to the conclusion that evil is nothing!

Then there are some Jewish theologians and liberal Christian philosophers who will explain that God is in the process of becoming who He is. He allowed much more evil in the Old Testament, but he has become “nicer” in the New Testament era.

The Muslim fundamentalists and the Calvinist Protestants maintain that both good and evil are the

Will of God/Allah, and must be accepted as divinely predestinated.

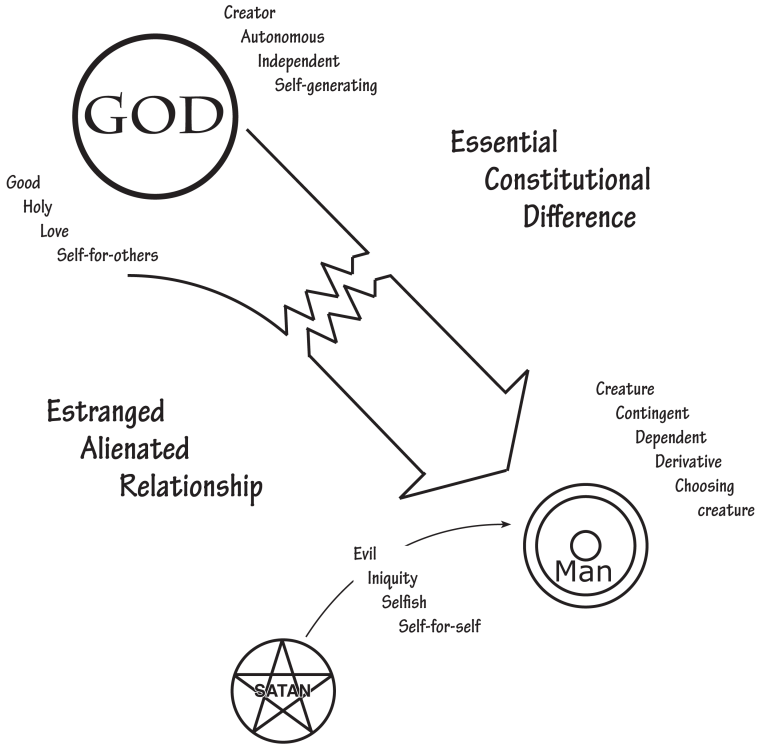
Some, like Norman Grubb, following Jacob Boehme, taught that God was a duality of good and evil, but He chose within Himself to be the good rather than the evil.

And probably the most prominent among evangelical Christians is the thesis that evil among men is a punishment from God on those who are disobedient and rebellious.

I will stick with the “antinomy of evil” explanation, which I admit is against the “law of reason” and cannot be logically figured out. But, again, this view does not consider evil to be outside of God’s comprehensive plan, and recognizes the personification of evil in the necessary negative of God’s character expressed by the spiritual adversary, Satan.



# The Absurdity of Sin





## 2

### **The Absurdity of Human Sin**

The *question* posed: If humanity was created by God, and placed into a perfect environment where every need was met by God, then why would mankind choose to defy God in disobedience and sin?

This has always been the realm of the study of *theological anthropology* (how God made man; what God intended for man; and the extent of man's freedom of choice). This also entails the study of *hamartiology* (from Greek *hamartios*) – sin that “misses the mark” and is contrary to God's character and intent.

#### **What we say:**

Our second “chicken bone” is “the absurdity of sin” – another one of the logical landmines that cause consternation among the thoughtful, reasoning people of the world. The very idea of “sin” is an inconceivable absurdity to the natural processes of human reasoning, especially if it is defined in a biblical and Christian context in relation to God.

Where else are we going to start as Christians than with God! God the Creator of every good and perfect thing (setting aside the antinomy of Satan) – the “giver of all good gifts” (James 1:17).

The Creator God, having eternal divine nature and infinite dimension, created human creatures *ek autos* (“out of Himself”). Those human creatures, though created *ek Theos* (out of God) were not God, or little gods. God created that which was “not Himself.” The Greater (God) created the lesser (mankind). From the intrinsic Being of Himself God created humans with extrinsic being (being derived out of another).

I have reiterated many times before, “God is God, and man is man.” That’s important! What Soren Kierkegaard called the “infinite qualitative difference” between God and man, I am calling the “essential constitutional difference” between God and man. Kierkegaard wrote, “God and man are as ‘far apart’ as ‘far apart’ can get.” Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, explained that God is “wholly other” than man – Deity and humanity are categories of being totally distinct from one another. That is consistent with God’s own declaration through Hosea, “I am God, and not man; the Holy One in your midst” (Hosea 11:9).

What God is, only God is; and He does what He does, because He is Who He is. He is autonomous and independent. He exercises His exclusive “free-will” in the Self-determination to act in accord with His own Being, and has the intrinsic power to Self-implement what He has Self-determined in the Self-generated expression of His own character.

However, He is not just a monadic power-source of divine energy. He is infinitely personal and personally infinite, and in His triune Being of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, He desires to draw the human creatures He has

created into participation in the perfect, loving relationality that exists in the interpersonal relationships of the Trinity. God is LOVE (I John 4:8,16), always existing and acting as a “Self-for-others,” seeking their highest good. Having made Himself known by the Self-revelation of His own Being and character in creation and in His Son, God desires to express His character through His creatures, allowing His absolute goodness, and holiness, and righteousness and love to flow through His creatures, energized and empowered by His own Grace, *ek Theos* (out of God).

The human creature, on the other hand, has an “essential constitutional difference” from God, as well as an “essential functional difference” from God. There is an *ontological* difference and an *operational* difference between God and man. What God IS, man is not! What God does, man cannot do! Man is not self-generative (*ek autos* – out of himself). Rather, humanity is contingent and dependent and derivative. Man must depend on God, and derive from God, or he cannot be man as God intended man to be. It is impossible for a human being to be an “independent self,” as only God is such. And, yes, this is a total denial of the humanistic premise that so pervades modern thinking – the idea that mankind is capable of being autonomous, independent, and self-generating, and can thus “do his own thing,” “solve his own problems,” and “build his own progressive utopias on earth.” This is but the false deification of man in place of God (attributing to man what is only attributable to God).

Why do I belabor the distinction between God and man? Because Christian teaching has for so long

neglected and falsified the anthropological understanding of how God created humanity, and how human beings are designed to function in relation to God. The reality of “derivative man” has been diminished in a “cover-up” that opens the door for psychologized explanations and spiritualized fantasies (secular psychology & New Age philosophy).

Proceeding then, we must note that despite God and man being so distinct in their constitutional and functional (ontological and operational) being, deity and humanity are not inimical to one another. Though different in their being (intrinsic and extrinsic), God and man are both personal, relational beings, capable of relationship with one another. God’s desire is to involve human individuals in the loving, relational participation of His triune interaction as Trinitarian God.

But He does not impose such. He does not coerce human creatures to act in accord with His intent. He Self-limited Himself to relate to human beings in the context of a freely chosen faith-love relationship. Exercising their human “freedom of choice” (not free-will), the first man and woman (Adam and Eve) were presented with the opportunity to partake of the “tree of life,” the choice-option to consent to the “divine outworking of the divinely in-breathed life of God in man.” (cf. Gen. 2:7,9)

Contrary to the situation with Lucifer in the realm of the angelic-creatures, however, there was now for mankind a genuine alternative of spiritually derived source. There was also in the middle of the Garden of Eden an alternative tree – the “tree of the knowledge of

good and evil, “ representing the counter-spiritual source from God’s desire, and carrying with it death instead of life (Gen. 2:17).

Satan, that adversarial antithesis, whose existence came in the “antinomy of evil” was present at the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” in the form of a snake, a serpent, described as “more crafty (clever, shrewd) than any beast of the field” (Gen. 3:1). The Evil One, the deceiver, the destroyer, the “father of lies,” suggested that man could be “like God” – a lie, as we have just posited, for God and man are essentially, constitutionally and functionally, distinct and different. It was the lie of humanism, that persists to this day, even in the evangelical teaching of Christian religion – that man can be independent, “go it alone,” and self-generate character contrary to God’s intent, i.e. “sin”.

Consistent with his character of ego-centric, self-orientation – a self-for-self perspective antithetical to God’s loving Self-for-others perspective – Satan was suggesting that instead of the Theo-centric orientation, man should assume an anthropocentric orientation whereby he would be his “own center of reference.” It was a ruse, a lie – man is incapable of being an “independent self” operating *ek autos* (out of himself) – and the only alternative to being dependent upon, and deriving from God (*ek Theos*), was to be in union with, dependent upon, and deriving from Satan (*ek diabolos* – “out of the devil”). Human beings derive spiritual character from one spiritual source or the other – either from God or from Satan (good or evil; life or death). This created-necessity of deriving spiritual character from one spiritual source or the others, should never foster

any form of passivism or acquiescence for human beings remain responsible beings, being response-able by freedom of choice, to make choices of derivation.

Oh the *folly* of humanity's rejection of God's desire – the *absurdity* of choosing to derive sinful character and expression from the diabolic antithesis of God, the Satanic originating source of all sinful character. The choice of the original couple in the Garden of Eden, in whom all mankind were in spiritual solidarity “in Adam,” produced an “estranged and alienated relationship” between man and God – a helpless and hopeless condition that man could not resolve by any actions on his part. The Fall of man into sin did not create human-devils whose very being was sinful and evil; human beings remained essentially human beings – spiritually, psychologically, and physically functional with freedom of choice – but they were now deriving from the wrong spirit. Mankind is not fixed in this condition of deriving evil and sinful character (as is Satan who has become the fixed Evil One), for human beings having deriving their spiritual condition and behavioral expression from Satan by his solicitations to sin, are still redeemable by the redemptive action of God.

**What does the wisdom of the world think of what we say:**

Those who do not believe in God consider it ridiculous to think that the Genesis account is an actual historical narrative rather than a figurative and symbolic legend of primitive, simplistic peoples.

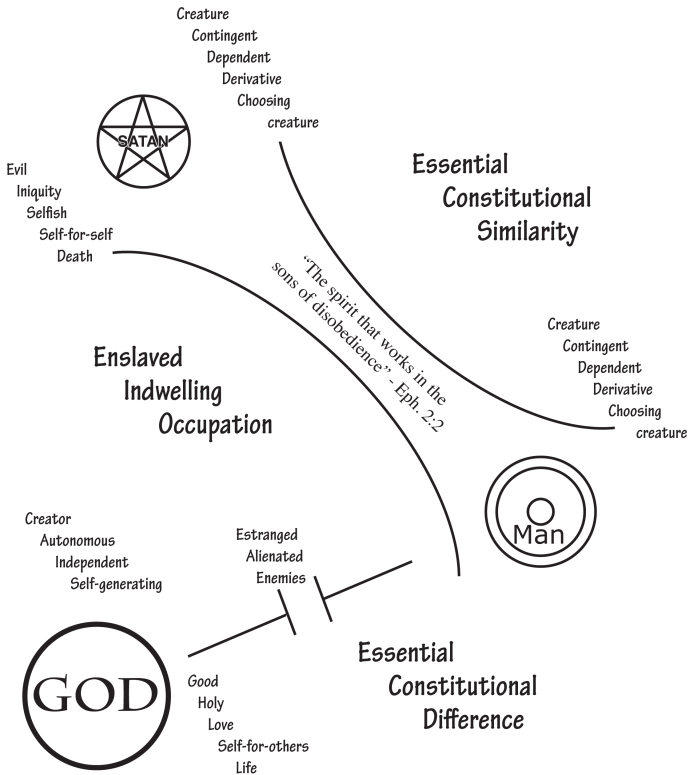


What kind of an answer is it, they ask, to say that “the devil ruined mankind’s idyllic picnic in the garden”? How unbelievable can you get? You have a man and a woman in an all-inclusive naturalist resort, and who’s going to believe that they’re going to be concerned about a couple of trees identified with moralistic labels? And then, it’s so ludicrous as to be hilariously laughable, this alleged first man and woman are conned by a talking snake – conned into thinking they could be ego-centric and self-sufficient, when allegedly they were signing-up for Satan-control. Their best defense would have been the Flip Wilson quip: “The devil made me do it!” And how fair is this: When they eat the best-looking fruit on the apple tree right in the middle of the garden, the consequence for their action is inconceivable – they had no idea what “death” entailed, so why are they held accountable for a penalty they could not even comprehend? They simply opted for the “seen” over the “unseen” – just what any normal human being will do – “a bird/apple in the hand is always worth two in the bush.”

Do we really expect those who have no understanding of spiritual realities to understand the spiritual implications of what happened in the early Genesis story? And even among those who believe in God and consider the biblical narrative as historical, the interpretations are often outlandish, and do not grasp the spiritual realities that transpire in the text of the narrative.



# The Dilemma of Fallen Humanity





### 3

## The Dilemma of Fallen Humanity

The question is: How can one man's choice, so long ago at the beginning of human history, affect all men? Why did God think it necessary to punish and inflict death on all mankind because of that one man's sin?

Topic: Such considerations involve the continued study of theological anthropology and how humanity functions, but we add to that the study of *Diabology* or *Satanology* – the study of the devil; as well as *Thanatology* – the study of death and what comprises death.

### What we say:

The original humans, Adam and Eve, were deceived by the diabolic Deceiver, the “father of lies,” when they were seduced and solicited by the ruse that mankind could be “his own center of reference,” an “independent self,” that he could operate and function *ek autos* (out of himself) – the truth being that as a derivative creature, man could only derive *ek Theos* (out of God) or *ek diabolos* (out of the devil) – one or the other, God or Satan.

God had warned the first human being about the consequence of death for the disobedience at the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” that rejected the

opportunity at the “tree of life” for the expression of God’s indwelling life, “In the day that you eat thereof, you will surely die (dying you will die)” (Gen. 2:17). It is questionable whether the first man fully understood the meaning of such death, especially since evangelical Christians to this day still do not understand the death-dilemma of fallen humanity.

From the “tree of life” God had invited the original couple to “eat freely,” indicating God’s desire to express His life in human behavior, but when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” God so respected the choice of man that He would not remain as an unwanted, unwelcome occupant within the spirit of man. The alternative was not that man could set up his own throne in his own kingdom and “do is own thing.” That was not an option because man is a dependent, contingent, and derivative creature. The only alternative spiritual source for man to derive from was the Evil One, the devil, Satan, whose character was the opposite of God – evil, selfish, sinful, unrighteous. As Adam was the representative man of all mankind, and all humanity was in spiritual solidarity with Adam, his choice affected all human beings; all men were “in Adam,” participants *en masse* in the disobedient sinful action of Adam, and the consequences of his action. Romans 5:12 – “through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

When God departed the spirit of original man, the “spirit of evil” replaced the Spirit of God with himself, the “spirit of error,” the “spirit of this world.” The “prince of the power of the air,” was henceforth “the

spirit that works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). The “whole world” of mankind was now “in” (i.e. under the control of, and in spiritual union with) “the Evil One” (I John 5:19). Fallen humanity, unregenerate mankind, the “natural man;” they were all now identified as “children of the devil” (I John 3:10), as “sinners” (Rom. 5:19) having spiritual identification of identity with the source of all sin – Satan.

Such spiritual identification does not constitute a form of diabolical determinism because human beings remain responsible choosing creatures, but it does imply that “out of the evil treasure, they put forth evil things” (Matt. 12:35).

Deriving *who they are* and *what they do* from the spiritual source of Satan, fallen humanity has a derived spiritual condition of “death” (Eph. 2:1,5), a derived spiritual identity as “sinners” (Rom. 5:19), and a derived spiritual nature of “wrath” (Eph. 2:3) – the nature of the spirit that indwells, occupies, and enslaves them. Unregenerate man is a “slave to sin” (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:6-20), in that the spirit whose character is sin occupies the core of his being. Whenever man sins, he derives what he does from the devil (I Jn. 3:8). Fallen men are “ensnared and held captive to do his will” (II Tim. 2:26). They are “under the dominion of the devil and deriving their character expression from the Evil One (Acts 26:18).

Humanity has found it difficult to perceive that evil, sin, and death are not just abstract philosophical categories of thought. They are the character of that spirit-being who is the antithesis of God, and are

personified in his being and action. Evil is personified in the Evil One; sin is personified as “crouching at the door” (Gen. 4:7) and “reigning” over fallen men (Rom. 5:21); and death “reigns” (Rom. 5:14,17) as a dynamic personified being “reigning” over mankind. The dilemma of fallen humanity is a spiritual condition whereby mankind are “under sin” (Rom. 3:9; Gal. 3:22), “under the law” (Rom. 3:19; 6:14,15; Gal. 3:23; 4:5; 5:18), and “in the flesh” (Rom. 8:8,9).

The spiritual condition of death is the dilemma of fallen humanity. When scripture records “in Adam all died” (I Cor. 15:22) and all became “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 5:1,5), this is not a legal indictment upon the human race by an enraged God who demands a death-penalty for the violation of His commands or character. This view of a vengeful God who demands to be appeased by death is foreign to a biblical understanding. When God first mentioned death to man, saying, “In the day that you eat thereof you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17), this was not a punitive threat, but an indicative statement of the necessary alternative to refusing the expression of His life. Because God created man as a dependent, contingent, derivative creature, if man does not partake of life, he must necessarily partake of, and derive from, the one who is personally and ontologically identified with death – “the one having the power of death, that is the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

When Satan, the death-dealer, occupies and indwells the spirit of fallen humanity, he brings in his character of sinful selfishness. Human beings are not inherently sinful – never have been and never will be! Evil or sinful character is not inherent to or intrinsic in human



beings. Yes, we are identified as “sinners” (Rom. 5:19) based on our spiritual condition and identity because of the spiritual presence of Satan, but that is his character, not ours! The predominant teaching of the church detoured from a biblical understanding of anthropology back in the fourth century when Augustine decided that fallen humanity was inherently and innately sinful due to Adam’s sin; that humanity was defective, deficient, and corrupted by sin; to the extent that a human being was no longer capable of being and functioning in the manner that God created him as a creature; but could function as an “independent self” to produce sin; and was under the indictment of a legal and juridical death-penalty imposed by the divine Judge in the heavenly courtroom. The label placed upon that terrible teaching is “original sin.” I do not believe in “original sin” in the Augustinian/Calvinistic sense that has been propagated by a large portion of the Church. I *do* believe in what the Eastern Orthodox portion of the Church refers to as “ancestral sin” (cf. John Romanides), whereby the original sin-action of the original man, Adam (ancestor to us all), bore consequences that affected the spiritual condition of all mankind in solidarity with himself in the dilemma of being occupied and indwelt by the sin-source of Satan. Man is not inherently sinful He is not a human-devil. The death-consequence that occurred by Adam’s sin when the diabolic death-dealer moved into human spirits leads to a dysfunctional, misused, abused humanity that fails to function as God intended.

There is indeed an “estranged alienated relationship” between God and man. God could not “deny Himself” (II Tim. 2:13). He could not overlook sin, contrary to the very character of His own Being, so Satan became the

necessary alternative spiritual-source energizing fallen mankind. When we are identified with this adversary, this opponent, the negative of God's positive, the "spirit of antichrist," we are even reckoned as "enemies" of God (cf. Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21), as the "one having the power of death" (Heb. 2:14) is spiritually operative within fallen/unregenerate humanity.

That is the diabolic death-dilemma of fallen mankind.

### **What the wisdom of the world thinks of what we say:**

The "wisdom of the world" is appalled that any person should be held guilty for the act of another – they reason that it's an unjust sentence pronounced by a punitive God, imposing a death-penalty upon all of created humanity. Their response to the new twist that I have put on the consequences of the fall of mankind into sin is just as unacceptable. That all of mankind are spiritually controlled by the devil, and are "slaves of sin" (Rom. 6) is beyond belief. Their humanistic thesis is that every human individual is a sovereign, independent, self-determining being.

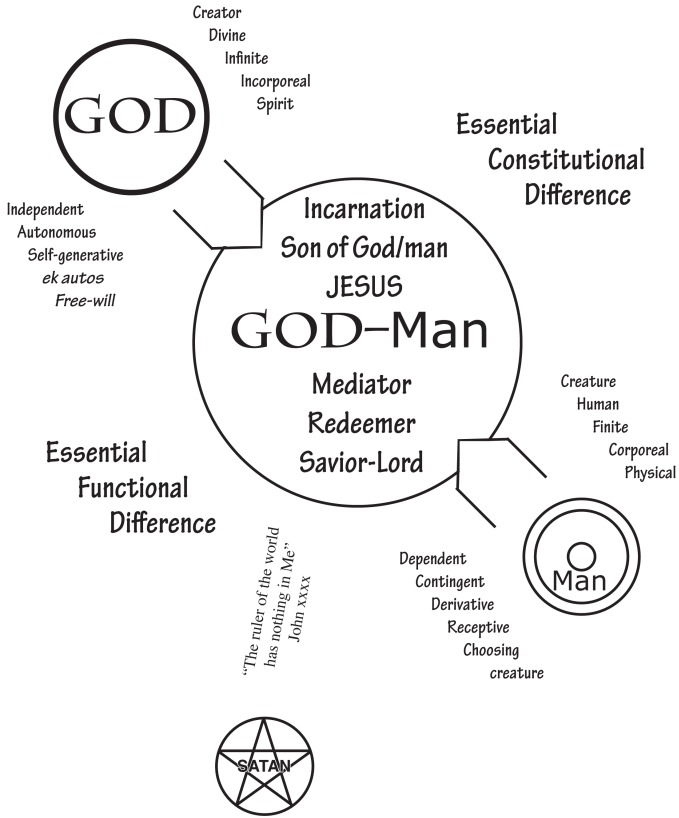
Evangelical theology (which is just the religious form of the "wisdom of this world") does not understand the death-dilemma of fallen humanity either. They accept and promote the thesis of "independent self" also, but their form of "evangelical humanism" explains that no human being is capable of doing good, but they are capable of self-generating evil and sin – in fact, necessarily fated to do so.

The much admired Augustine, back in the fourth century, decided that the dilemma of fallen humanity was not spiritual solidarity with the death-dealing devil, but man's humanity was corrupted, infected, deficient and defective. Man's "nature" became evil and sinful, and his human faculties no longer functioned, for he was incapable of proper thinking about God, of having any affections toward God, and the will of man was in bondage to an innate taint or bias of sin and evil. Man was essentially a human-devil. This inherent "depravity" of human nature and of all human faculties brought on by the "original sin" of Adam implies that mankind are no longer capable of functioning as the human beings that God created them to be, and their value before God is a bankrupted "zero." The penalty of sin imposed as a death-sentence by an offended and punitive God is an indictment upon humanity-at-large in a fateful damnation to perdition.

This concept of the "death-dilemma of fallen humanity" is a "chicken bone" that sticks in the throat and continues to choke and gag evangelical Christian thinkers to this day.



# The Paradox of the God-man





## 4

### **The Paradox of the God-man**

The question: If it be true that God and Creator and man the creature have an “essential constitutional and functional difference,” how can one historical individual be deemed to be both God and man – the God-man?

Topic: The topic of study at this point is called *Christology* – attempting to explain how the Person of Jesus Christ effected at the *Incarnation* involved the union of deity and humanity in one historic individual.

#### **What we say:**

The “good news” of the gospel begins with what Soren Kierkegaard called the “Absolute Paradox” of the God-man. If we assert, as we have, that God is God, and man is man; and the intrinsic Being of God and the extrinsic being of man are as “far apart as far apart can get,” then it is certainly implausible, if not impossible, that God and man can be joined in a God-man. But that is the “impossible possibility” (as Karl Barth called it), and comprises the incarnational foundation of the Christian gospel. With God “nothing is impossible” (Lk. 1:37), and only He could bring into being the unparalleled paradox that could effect the bringing together of God and man.

Though God and man have an “essential constitutional difference,” for God is the Creator and man is a creature; God is divine and man is human; God is infinite and man is finite; God is incorporeal Spirit and man is a corporeal physical entity with spirit-capacity – and even though God and man have an “essential functional difference” wherein God is independent and man is dependent; God is autonomous and man is contingent; God is Self-generative while man is receptive; God acts and functions *ek autos* (out of Himself) and human beings are choosing creatures who derive all character and action from a spirit-source, either *ek Theos* or *ek diabolos* – and even though the “absurdity of human sin” caused an “estranged alienation of relationship” between God and man in the “dilemma of fallen humanity” being occupied and energized by the death-dealing Evil One, God is not a punitive, vengeful, angry God. God is LOVE (I Jn. 4:8,16) – He seeks our highest good. God is always FOR us – not against us! May we never forget that!

Only God could take the polarity of an *either/or* dichotomy between He and mankind, and cause it to be a *both/and* conjunction in the paradox of the God-man. Humanity was helpless and hopeless in their estranged condition of spiritual death, but God by the initiative of His grace, “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn. 3:16) that we might have His life instead of the death-presence of the devil. Only God could counteract Satan’s power of death, and forgive the sin that violated His character. Since God’s “thoughts are not our thoughts; neither are His ways our ways” (Isa. 55:8,9), He enacted an unparalleled paradox of bringing God and man together in a God-man. It’s a



paradox to human logic, but in the Theo-logic of God's mind it is simply His acting in grace.

In the eternal counsels of the Triune God, it was determined that the Son of God would become an individual human being, that "the Word who was with God and was God" (John 1:1,2) would "be made flesh" (John 1:14), even though that comprises an incompatible complexity (paradox). Paul explained to the Philippians that the Son "although He existed in the form of God, did not consider divine function an equal right that He had to hold on to, but voluntarily emptied Himself of the divine right and prerogative of divine function, in order to function dependently, contingently and derivatively in the form of a human bond-servant, functioning in the likeness of mankind" (Phil. 2:6,7-paraphrase).

"In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The pre-existent (Jn. 1:1; 8:58; 19:4) Son of God (Matt. 16:16; I Jn. 3:8) became the temporal and locative "son of man" (Mk. 8:31; 9:31), to be called Emmanuel ("God with/in us") and Jesus (Jehovah saves). By the supernatural conception of the Spirit in the womb of Mary, the conjoined God-man took form, and with only God as His Father he did not partake of the dilemma of spiritual death. He could say, and did say, "the ruler of this world has nothing in Me" (John 14:30).

Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man. One hundred percent God and one hundred percent man – never less than God, and never more than man. The "fullness of God dwelt in Him" (Col. 1:19), and He could

say, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30) – one in essential being (not just one in purpose and objective). He could claim to be the “I AM” who declared Himself to be the “I AM that I AM” to Moses at the time of the Exodus.

At the same time, He was fully and perfectly human, “found in the form of a man” (Phil. 2:8). He did not just “appear” to be a man, as the early heresy of Docetism advocated, he was truly and fully human in constitution and function. He did not assume a “corrupted humanity” as some have indicated – he was Perfect Man – man as God intended man to be.

What Christians have called the “hypostatic union” of deity and humanity in the singular human individual of Jesus, should not be construed as an homogenized hybrid-being, but a true union of deity and humanity that is indivisible and indissoluble. Neither deity or humanity was subsumed or absorbed into the other constitutive element of His being – His humanity was not divinized, nor was his deity humanized. He was God and man at the same time – the God-man.

Though He could *be* God and *be* man at the same time – simultaneously; he could not *behave* as God and *behave* as man at the same time. God functions Self-generatively *ek autos* (out of Himself), but human beings function derivatively “out of” a spirit-source (either *ek Theos* or *ek diabolos*). God does everything “of His own initiative,” exercising His Free-will to Self-determine what He will do in accordance with His character, and exercising His inherent power to implement His determination by His own Self-

generated action. Man cannot function *ek autos* (out of himself) – though that is the lie of humanism that has been propagated since the first man was in the garden. (The evangelical humanism that pervades so much of religious thought today has failed to understand that man cannot be an “independent self” functioning *ek autos*, and that is the reason they are unable to understand the human function of Jesus Christ also.)

Essentially God, Jesus “emptied Himself” of the divine right and prerogative of divine function in order to function relationally with God as a man, willing to be a functional “bond-servant” subservient to and obedient to the Father at every moment in time for 33 years. He functioned – He lived every moment of His life by the faith that allowed for “the receptivity of God’s activity” in the man. Though God does everything at His own initiative, Jesus kept saying, “I do nothing of my own initiative” (Jn. 5:19,30; 8:28,42; 12:49), “the Father abiding in Me does His works” (John 14:10). How did He work miracles? Peter explained that Jesus was “a man attested by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed *through* Him” (Acts 2:22). Jesus lived and acted in the “obedience of faith” that allowed God the Father to function in and through Him. This pre-empts the common Christian cop-out that “Jesus could do what He did, because He was God; but me, I’m just human.” Jesus did not do what He did because He was God, and we do not recognize the resource we have as “partakers of the divine nature” (II Peter 1:4).

Jesus “accomplished the work that the Father gave Him to do” (John 17:4) as “the Father abiding in Him did His works” (John 14:10). He was “obedient unto death”

(Phil. 2:8), as we shall proceed to consider. He was “the one mediator between God and man” (I Tim. 2:5), redeeming (Titus 2:14) by “paying the price” of submitting Himself to death in order to be the Savior and Lord who restores His divine life within mankind.

How He could *be* this and *accomplish* such as the God-man remains a problematic paradox, an incomprehensible conundrum that natural reasoning will never comprehend.

### **What the wisdom of the world thinks of what we say:**

The secular and humanistic “wisdom of this world” considers it inconceivable that a particular historical baby born in a manger – a helpless infant born in a sheep-stall in the nondescript village of Bethlehem almost two millennia ago could really be the God of the universe in human form.

From the perspective of pure human logic it is indeed impossible that God and man could be conjoined in what Christian theologians call the “hypostatic union” of deity and humanity in one individual. If we commence with the premise that “God is God, and man is man,” with an essential constitutional and functional difference between the two categories of being, then it is paradoxically absurd, logically invalid, to suggest that Jesus was the God-man.

That the “Word became flesh” (Jn. 1:14) paradoxically places the *loftiness* of the Almighty God with the *lowliness* of a poor, suffering, and (to all

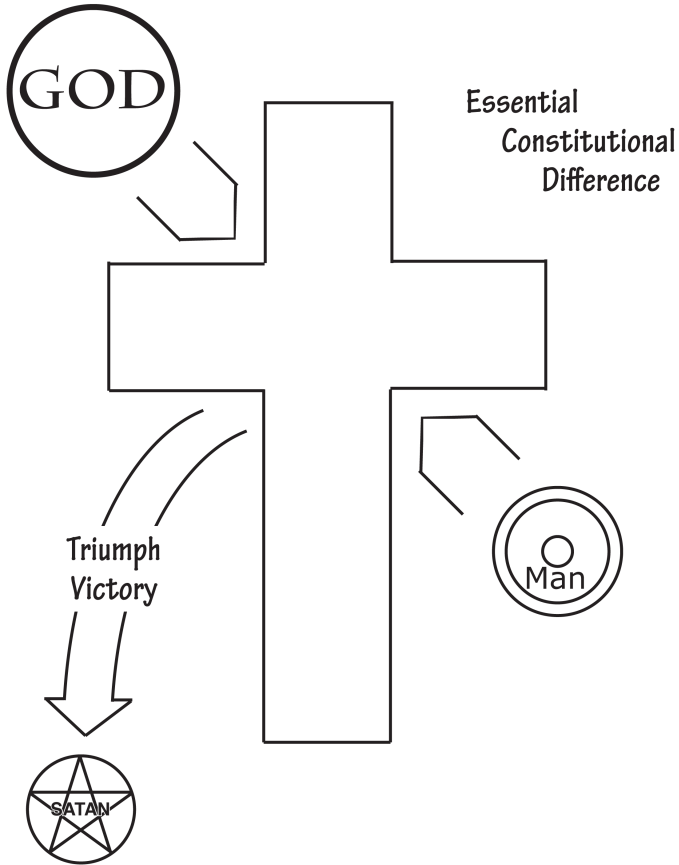
outward appearances) an impotent man, who like a lamb was silently led to slaughter. Such condescension unto abasement is totally incongruous, if not contemptible. That the omnipotent and authoritative Lord of the cosmos should take “the form of a servant” in the servile submission even unto death – it is indeed a mind-blowing phenomenon.

And the contemporary religious wisdom that may assent to the Christological God-man, apologetically defending the deity of Jesus in order to promote a miraculous gospel, often fails to appreciate the *humanity* of Jesus and His identification with functional mankind. When asked to explain how Jesus lived as He did here on earth during His redemptive mission, evangelicals often indicate that Jesus lived like He lived, and did the amazing things that He did, because He was God. Not so! The scriptures explain that “the man, Christ Jesus” (cf. Acts 2:22; I Tim. 2:5), was “made like His brethren in all things” (Heb. 2:17), even to be “tempted in all things as we are” (Heb. 4:15), in order to exercise the faith of “receptivity to God’s activity” in every action. The physical Jesus lived for every moment in time for 33 years in complete dependence upon the Father (cf. Jn. 14:10), and was thus the Perfect Man, without sin (cf. II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15).

When evangelicals fail to recognize the functional behavior of “the Man Christ Jesus,” they set Christian people up for the excuse that “Jesus could live like He did, because He was God, but me, I’m just human and can, therefore, never be expected to live a holy life. That is the religious wisdom so prominent today.



# The Scandal of the Cross







## The Scandal of the Cross

The question: Why was it necessary for Jesus to die?  
How could one man's death bring life to all men?

Topic: *Redemption* is the biblical word for “paying the price” to “buy something back.” The theological doctrine of *Soteriology* is the study of how the death of Jesus Christ on a Roman cross can be considered efficacious for the atonement/reconciliation and salvation of humanity.

### What we say:

This entire study on “the chicken bones of Christian thought” began with my consideration of Paul's statements in I Corinthians 1:18–2:16. At the same time I was reading Soren Kierkegaard's expansion of the theme of the “scandal” of Christian thought.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles foolishness” (I Cor. 1:23). The Greek word Paul used to describe the Jewish response to a crucified Messiah was “*scandalon*,” from which we get the English word, “scandal.” The Greek word Paul used to describe the Gentiles response to an executed hero-figure was *morion*, from which we get the English word “moron.” Since from a Jewish perspective all humanity was

categorized as either Jew or Gentile, the whole of humanity viewed the death of Jesus on a cross as either “scandalous” or “moronic.”

Steeped in the written law of God, the Jewish population knew God’s declaration, “Cursed is every one who is hanged on a tree” (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). It was an unacceptable disgrace, a shameful reproach, that one who claimed to be the Messiah, the Christ, could be cursed in this way. It was such a denigrating discredit to Yahweh that maligned His word and created an outrageous obstacle – an unacceptable stumbling-block, a road-block to all reasonableness.

The Roman and Greek Gentiles, on the other hand, were used to cosmic power-deities like Jupiter and Zeus who never failed and were beyond humiliation. It was inconceivably moronic and absurd that a god-figure could or would be crucified, for this was a punitive Roman execution reserved for the worst of murderers, traitors, and slaves. To the non-Jewish Gentiles the thought of such was beyond all reasonable consideration – a contradiction to be rejected as absurd.

But it was God’s foreordained intent before time began that the Son of God would become the paradoxical God-man in the incarnation for the very purpose of being slain (Rev. 5:6,12) in physical death. Jesus said, “the Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). As the old spiritual stated, “He came for to die.”

This is problematic – the explanation of Christ’s death on a cross. Since God and man have an “essential

constitutional difference,” how can a God-man die? God is the living God who “has life in Himself” (Jn. 5:26), and gave the Son to have “life in Himself.” God cannot die! Early in the history of the church the determiners of church dogma declared that patripassionism (the idea that God the Father could suffer and die) was heresy.

But fallen man is mortal. Fallen men can and do die, for Paul explained to the Hebrews that “it is appointed unto man once to die, and then comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Our next question is: To what extent did Jesus partake of fallen humanity. You will recall that I said that death is not intrinsic to humanity; mortality is not an essential part of humanness. Death, via the one having the power of death (the devil), entered into humankind in the dilemma of fallen humanity. Since the death-dealer, the ruler of this world, had nothing in Jesus (John 14:30), Jesus did *not have to die* – just because He was a man. He chose, He consented, He volunteered to bear mortal flesh when the “Word became flesh” and He “emptied Himself” of divine prerogative in order to be sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3), subject to the mortality of physical death. And then, rather than being a victim of the death-edict of the Jewish and Roman authorities, He chose to submit to death (? both physical and spiritual) in our place. He “laid down His life” for us (John 10:15,17; I Jn. 3:16).

He died as a man (for only man can die), and He did so in our place, on our behalf. We refer to this as the “substitutionary vicarious death” of Jesus Christ for all mankind. Sinless, and undeserving of any death, Jesus consented to death in order to accomplish the work for

which the Father sent Him (Jn. 17:4). His death was not the consequence of any sin in Himself, but He was “made sin” (II Cor. 5:21). Jesus did not become the essential character of evil or sin, as only Satan is, but He was derivatively identified with sin, in like manner as all men were “made sinners” (Rom. 5:19) in the consequence of the fall, and that by the imputed and imparted presence of the sin-source, Satan, the diabolic death-dealer. From the cross He victoriously declared, “*Tetelestai*” (“It is finished” – the end-objective to conquer death has been achieved), and then said, “Father into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Lk. 23:46), gave up His spirit (John 19:30), and as “the body apart from the spirit is dead” (James 2:26), He died a real human death as a mortal man. (No faked swoon, as has been suggested by some).

But few there are who seem to understand what His death entailed. The One Perfect representative man – the God-man – voluntarily submitted Himself to the power of the Satanic death-dealer. And in His death he severed the right and power of personified sin and death to control mankind. It was the “death of death in the death of Jesus Christ,” as the old Puritan writer, John Owen, once entitled his book (even though his explanation was inadequate). Jesus *incurred* all the death consequences of sin that had *occurred* in Adam, in order to redeem and restore mankind. “Death could not hold Him,” Peter declared on Pentecost. The diabolic death-dealer “having the power of death” (Heb. 2:14) could not hold Jesus in death, for He was the sinless sacrifice; and “God raised Him up, putting an end to the agony of death (being subjected to the death-dealer on our behalf)” (Acts 2:24). Jesus was “put to death in the

flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (I Pet. 3:18), declared to be “the Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:8) by resurrection from the dead, in order to bring divine life to man in the place of death (John 10:10). He came to conquer, overcome, and oust the death-dealer who had invaded mankind. He took our death, that we might have His life.

Throughout the history of Christian thought there have been many attempts to explain the death of Jesus that has been regarded as scandalous to the natural reasoning of human thought. There have been numerous theories of the atonement based on various biblical concepts and images through the centuries (as well there should be), but may I suggest that the explanation of the death of Jesus that has predominated in evangelical thought for the past couple of centuries provides an even greater “*scandal* of the cross” than was presented to the Jews and Gentiles of the first century. I am referring to the idea that it was necessary for Jesus to die in order to assume the punitive death consequences of an angry and vindictive God. I do not believe that Jesus had to die to pay the divine death-penalty for the sins of mankind! Theologically this is identified as “the penal substitution model of the atonement.” It all starts with a forensic, legal and juridical view of God as a cosmic Judge who threatened mankind with death (Gen. 2:17) if they disobeyed by partaking of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” When they disobeyed, God was allegedly offended at the violation of His character, and adamantly demanded a retributive punishment of death. God imposed a death-penalty upon mankind. As the theory goes, Jesus then volunteered to be the “penal substitute”

in death, willing to offer Himself to bear the divine punishment of death, in order to satisfy the just demands of the offended Judge, thus paying off the penalty of sin to assuage a violated God and alter the forensic status and standing of men before God by an imputed righteousness. What's wrong with that picture? God the Father and God the Son are at odds with one another. The Trinity is rent apart. God the Father is angry and vindictive, and God the Son is loving and gracious in His attempt to appease the Father. As one little boy summed it up: "Jesus I like, but the Father God seems to be really mean!"

That "penal substitution" theory has been the predominant explanation of the death of Jesus for a long time in Western Christian thought. It is time to rid the Christian faith of such a scandalous interpretation of the cross. This theory fails to take into account the spiritual contrast and conflict between God and Satan. It makes God the Father out to be the death-dealer who imposes death on fallen mankind, rather than identifying death in conjunction with the diabolic death-dealer, "the one having the power of death, that is the devil" (Heb. 2:14). It fails to recognize the ontological identification of life and death (in the spiritual being of God and Satan), and can never account for the spiritual and ontological reconciliation of God and man in spiritual atonement (at-one-ment).

So, the primary point to be made is that in submitting to mortal-death by crucifixion on the cross, Jesus effected the defeat of the death-dealer who had usurped the spiritual control of mankind to express his character of evil, sin and death. Jesus became a human

being “that through death He might destroy and render powerless the one having the power of death, that is the devil” (Heb. 2:14). “The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8). “God disarmed the (demonic) rulers and authorities, making a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Christ” (Col. 2:15). The ultimate scandalous defeat of physical life in criminal execution became the ultimate triumph and victory over evil.

This is a radically different understanding of the “scandal of the cross” – of the atonement. Jesus was the representative Man, who in our place, as our substitute, faced-off with the diabolic death-dealer, and in His crucifixion-death effected the “death of death” in order to give His live to receptive humanity. He enacted the reversal of the diabolic death consequences, in order to effect the restoration of God’s life in man. Since this explanation has, to my knowledge, never been labeled previously, I propose that we might refer to it as “the death of death model of the atonement.”

### **What the wisdom of the world thinks of what we say:**

The apostle Paul made it clear to the Corinthians (1:18–2:16) that in the first century the wisdom of the world considered the crucifixion of the Christ to either be “moronic foolishness” (the opinion of the Gentiles) or a “scandalous stumbling-block” (the opinion of the Jewish peoples). Have the opinions changed in the twenty-first century?

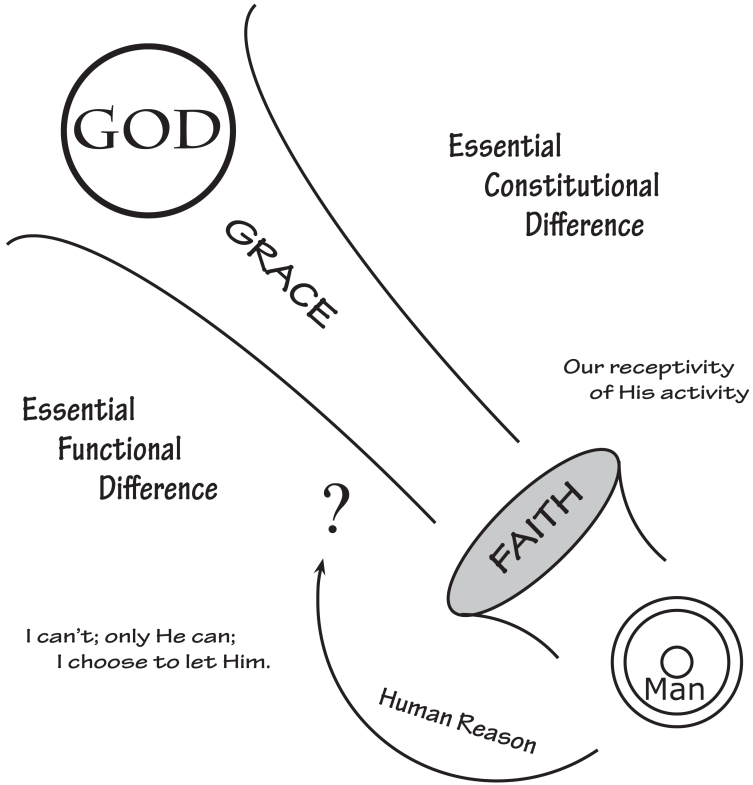
The secularists still shake their heads in disbelief. It doesn't make sense. Who would start a religion centered around a man who was executed by the governmental authorities for insurrection, and then claim that his death was really a divine triumph and victory? A criminalized Christ, a murdered Messiah, a defeated victor, these are oxymorons beyond the belief of reasonable people, but latched onto by a few gullible and superstitious religionists – that is the opinion of rationalist thinking today.

The evangelical religionists of our day have made the “scandal of the cross” into an even greater scandal. The penal substitution model of interpreting the death of Jesus on the cross dissects and divides the mind of God, casting God the Father as a vengeful figure who demands to be appeased by the penalty of death, and viewing Jesus, the Son of God, as the One willing to bear the brunt of God the Father's vindictive punishment. That interpretation skews the message of “Christ crucified” into a grotesque martyrdom image that fails to appreciate how the Son of God willing volunteered to become the vicarious substitute to “taste death” (Heb. 2:9) for all men by subjection to the death-dealing devil on behalf of all human beings in order to render Satan powerless (Heb. 2:14) over humanity, and make available His own divine life for the restoration of mankind to God's intent.

But it is important that Christians always remember that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross will always be a scandal and an offense to the mind of natural men



# The Offense of Faith





## 6

### The Offense of Faith

The question: Are we to believe what is contrary to reason? God made us rational beings – are we to suspend our ability to reason in order to believe in the “paradox of the God-man” and the “scandal of the cross”? And why does such Christian faith render all human ability to be of no consequence.

Topic: The study of these questions involves the disciplines of *Epistemology* – what is the basis that we “stand upon” to posit our belief; as well as the category of *Pistology* – the study of faith (Greek word *pistis*).

#### What we say:

Among Christian people today the idea of “faith” appears to be such a benign, bland, harmless, *inoffensive* term that is not perceived to give *offense* to anyone. Such can only be the case if we have accepted an inadequate understanding of Christian faith ... if we have allowed “faith” to deteriorate into the meaning of “mental assent to data,” or belief in propositional and doctrinal statements to form our own opinions. Then, in adaptation to the world’s thinking, we acquiesce to the premise that “anyone can believe whatever they want to believe, for we live in a diverse and pluralistic society that tolerates any and all the beliefs of others.” “You

believe; I believe; it really does matter what you believe. Faith is faith!"

Christian faith is of an entirely different order. It's not really about what one believes objectively and rationally with their mind. Faith moves beyond the intellectual, cerebral sphere of thought. In fact, **if** it is something you can figure out with your mind, then it is not likely to have anything to do with faith!

Faith is experiential. Faith has to do with life, with the subjectivity of our being and existence, and can therefore be said to be existential. Faith has to do with who we are, and who we are becoming. Faith is not the static assent of a belief-system, but is rather the dynamic of "our receptivity of His activity." Faith is the surrender of one's entire being to Another, and to find one's identity of being in that Other – Jesus Christ – as a Christ-one, a Christian. In this total venture of abandonment to another (what Kierkegaard calls "the leap of faith"), the Other becomes one's life, one's new identity, one's new self. Natural understanding would regard this to be psychological suicide, but the Christian discovers the blessedness of an intimacy whereby we live by the life of Another in "the availability to His ability." We only venture into faith in the context of what by natural means could only be considered absurdity.

So, in what sense, then, does genuine Christian faith present the possibility of "offense"?

Consider with me the "offense of faith" in relation to *human reasoning*. Enlightenment based rationality

demands the right to affirm the veracity and assent to the proven facts, and thereby accept or reject the viability of any offer or ideological option. The object of faith is not ideas, or propositional truths, or correct doctrines, but the Person of the living Lord Jesus who is the Truth and Reality of all that is really real!

Consider the “offense of faith” in relation to the *reasonableness* of the Christian gospel and Christian faith. Trying to play on the rationalist’s playing field, we have developed “Christian apologetics” to attempt to logically defend what will inevitably offend human reason. Faith ventures all, despite how unreasonable the rationalists consider the gospel to be.

Faith is an offense to the quest of the human mind to *understand* everything, and arrive at a goal of knowledge. The classic Latin motto was, “*credo ut intelligam*” (“I believe in order to understand”). Christian faith does not seek to mentally understand, but only to “stand-under” the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Faith is at cross-purposes with human *knowability* via the criteria of historical or theological evaluation. Christian faith does not seek data-knowledge, but the “knowing” (the intercourse) of personal intimacy with God in Christ.

Faith is offensive to *objectivity* and external verification. Christian faith is willing to suspend the detached perspective of objectivity, in order to subjectively enter into the story – HIS story. Faith is inwardness, and the story is HIM (and us encompassed in HIS story).

Consider the offense of faith in relation to our demands for *direct access* and direct communication. To approach the ineffable God directly is paganism, and the basis of idolatry. Christian faith accepts the “indirect communication” of what may not “appear” to be God, but will be regarded as His way of speaking to us, perhaps in a “still small voice,” or perhaps in a “thunder-clap.”

Faith is contrary to *observability* and the desire to “see” in order to prove. The “unseen,” the incognito is the focus of faith. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who do not see, yet believe” (Jn. 20:29). The world declares, “I wouldn’t have believed it, if I hadn’t seen it,” but the person of faith says, “I wouldn’t have seen it, if I hadn’t believed it.”

Faith is in juxtaposition to the *personal initiative* that insists on making the effort to acquire and “take hold of” something. The world says, “If I can’t do something to get it or maintain it, then it’s not worth having. I’m not a beggar; I’m not on the dole. I’m not a welfare recipient. I don’t take hand-outs.” Genuine faith is beyond our grasp! We can only receive!

Faith is contrasted with all *human ability* and human potential that asserts, “You can be and do anything you want to be and do.” Jesus said, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing,” and Christian faith submits to that. We derive everything, and produce nothing. There is nothing more offensive to the natural man than to ask him to admit there is nothing he can do, that his activity is irrelevant and of no eternal value.

Faith is an offense to the human desire to be “*in control*” of ourselves, and the situation around us. “The Spirit moves where it will,” Jesus said (Jn. 3:8). Christian faith takes everything out of our hands. We are not in control. We “go with the flow” of His grace.

Faith is an offense to the development of our *personality*, which we think is “who we are.” Faith is the relinquishing all pride of autonomy, willing to take ourselves out of the equation, and to recognize that to be a truly free self, one must “give himself up” (Matt. 10:39; 16:25), surrender and abandon one’s being, to the extent of finding one’s identity in Another.

Faith is contrary to our *fears* that often drive us to do what we do. “Fear not,” Jesus said, “for I AM with you” (John 6:20). One of the greatest fears of modern man is that we should have to give ourselves up, even “deny ourselves,” to disavow and disallow our self-orientation. That is what Christian faith requires and accomplishes!

Faith is an offense in its call to *suffering* and *death*, experiences that we do everything we can to avoid. Faith is an invitation to die to all worldly and personal concerns. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die” (*Call to Discipleship*). Truth will always suffer. Christ’s life demands the death of all that is not consistent with Him.

Faith is antithetical to *probability* and *predictability*, making our own plans and charting our own course. If it fits in the realm of probability, then it probably is not faith. Faith is unpredictable, and prompts us to live in the spontaneity of imaginative passion.

Faith is an offense in its acceptance of a position of *subservience* and having to *serve* others. Christian faith involves functioning as a bond-servant to the Lord Jesus Christ and others.

Consider the offense of faith in relation to one's "comfort zone" and personal "space." Faith will often require us to "go outside the box" of our comfortable confines of carefully considered categories.

Faith is an offense to *social propriety* and respectability and the consideration of what other people think. Faith will often take us outside the established order, causing us to be different from others, to be "the odd man out" in non-conformity. Martin Luther said, "Where Christ is, He always goes against the flow/stream."

Faith wrecks havoc in *family loyalties*. Those closest to us cannot understand why our faith takes us where it does. Jesus even said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk. 14:26).

Faith is an offense to all *religion* with its demands to "believe-right" and "do-right" in regard to correct doctrines and proper behavior. Christian faith takes us beyond such, sometimes to rejection of religion, in order to follow HIM.

What is the opposite of the "offense of faith"? How about the "obedience of faith" that Paul refers to in Rom. 1:5; 16:26. I was quite surprised to note in the



thesaurus that the antonym of “offense” was “obedience.” Faith is offensive to human reasoning and normal social practice, but the “obedience of faith” is pleasing to God. Faith is an offense to all insubordination and rebellion of those who want to “go their own way,” and “do their own thing.” In faith we “listen under God” (*hupakouo*) in obedience to ascertain what Christ wants to do next in our lives, and in faithful “receptivity to His activity” we allow Him to do whatever He wants as the contemporary Christ-expression in our behavior, unto His own glory.”

Christian faith is always exercised in the present, in the experiential “now” (which is always offensive to the world’s inculcations to projected planning and probabilities). And we are often forced into faith in the crises of life, in the utmost of extremity, at the point of desperation, wherein we are willing to “give up” and say, “I can’t; only He can; I choose to let Him do whatever He will in my life.” This does not happen at a singular, punctiliar point in time, but day-by-day, moment-by-moment. There is initial faith and continuing faith. “As you received Christ Jesus (by faith); so walk in Him (by faith)” (Col. 2:6).

Those who heard Jesus were often offended (Matt. 15:12), and Jesus once said, “Blessed is he, who shall not be offended in Me” (Lk. 7:23). Genuine Christian faith will not be offended by Jesus, because such faith comes with no personal expectations.

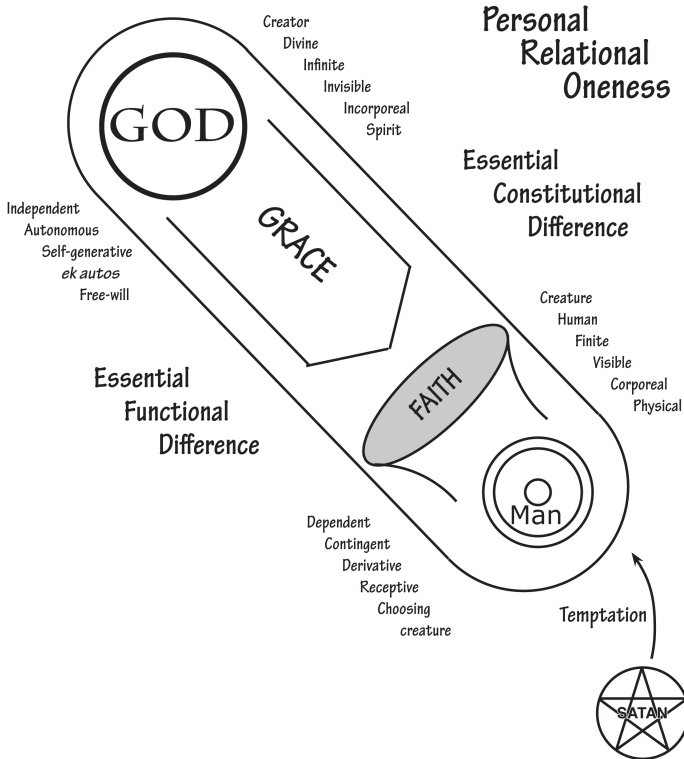
## **What the wisdom of the world thinks of what we say:**

It is here that the “wisdom of the world” agrees with what we have said about “the offense of faith.” Christian faith is an offense against all human reasoning, and humanism considers the mind of man to be the ultimate criteria for determining truth and reality. Deified reason. Christian faith considers logical thought-processes to be rather impertinent to what is of ultimate and eternal value in Jesus Christ.

In addition to the challenge to human reason, there is nothing more offensive to the natural man than the denial of his human ability to reach the highest goals, to ask him to admit there is nothing he can achieve or accomplish to be a man as God intends a man to be. It's only by the receptivity of God's activity.

The wisdom of the world is entirely baffled by the individual who comes to the crossroad of offended reason and the denial of human ability, and then accepts Pascal's “wager” to “bet one's life and being on Jesus,” or is willing to venture everything to Kierkegaard's “leap of faith.” Yes, Christian faith is often an act of desperation – made when we have come to the conclusion that “nothing else works!”

# The Mystery of Participation with/in God





## The Mystery of Participation with/in God

The question: “Since God and man are wholly different beings, how can a human being be joined with God? Is it really possible that humans can participate in union with God?”

Topic: The consideration of these issues take us into the study of *Pneumatology*, the study of spiritual things; and into what the Eastern Orthodox portion of the Church has referred to as *Theosis*, the development of “Godness” in the Christian follower.

### What we say:

Yes, God, with *intrinsic* divine Being, and man, with *extrinsic* created human being, have an “essential constitutional difference” – God is God, and man is man. In addition, there is an “essential functional difference” between the Self-generative God and the derivative human being. But both God and man are personal relational beings capable of having “Personal Relational Oneness” with one another. The personal loving God with perfect interpersonal relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, created personal human beings in order that they might participate with, and in, the loving interpersonal relations of His Triune Being in the most intimate of personal relationship.

After the fall of man into the “dilemma of death” via the “absurdity of sin,” God orchestrated the “paradox of the God-man” who was obedient in the “scandal of the cross”, and by His resurrection from the dead made the very life of God available to man, that He, God, might dwell in man, to become our life ... and that spiritual participation is made efficacious in an individual, subjectively via the “offense of faith.” ... It all fits together, and is most reasonable within the parameters of “spiritual understanding.”

The scriptures do refer to such a relationship as a “mystery” (Greek word *musterion* meaning “once concealed, now revealed” – not a “mystery” in the sense that it is a secret that we must be detective-sleuths trying to figure out “whodunit” – we know whodunit, God in Christ). Paul concludes his epistle to the Romans by mentioning “the revelation of the *mystery* which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to *obedience of faith...*” (Rom. 16:25,26). “We speak God’s wisdom in a mystery” (I Cor. 2:7), Paul wrote to the Corinthians. This “mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19) is “the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4; Col. 4:3), for “this is the mystery, Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), in Whom alone is the “mystery of godliness” (I Tim. 3:16).

This “mystery of Christ Jesus” is an unfathomable mystery that is inexplicable to the non-Christian, the “natural man who is incapable of understanding spiritual things” (I Cor. 2:14). But the sad part is that

most who call themselves “Christians” in the churches of the Western world today are just as clueless when it comes to participating with/in God in Christ. Rationalistic, enlightenment-based theology has advised western Christians that “mystery” is connected to mysticism and esoteric pursuits of ambiguous abstractions of fanciful speculations and projections, and they have cautioned western Christians not to be “so heavenly-minded, they are of no earthly good.” In so doing they have steered Christians away from “the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19).

The large ellipse in the diagram is inclusive of both God and man, representing that God and man participate together in a “Personal Relational Oneness.” To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “the one who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit with Him” (I Cor. 6:17). Such a spiritual union between God and man is not an “essential union” wherein either God or man becomes the other. The Christian individual is not deified or divinized; not “elevated to the God-level” as a “little god;” and not supernaturally transformed into Christ. The Christian remains a distinct person whose humanity is not displaced or replaced, and not substituted or subsumed by God. This union does not create a fusion, syncretism or coalescence that makes us equivalent or identical to Christ.

The circle representing GOD must be understood to be the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – which is the distinctively Christian understanding of God. Our participation with/in God is effected by our becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4), “partakers of Christ” (Heb. 3:14), and “partakers of the Holy Spirit”

(Heb. 6:4) ... partakers of the fullness of the triune God. God the Father abides in us (I Jn. 4:12,15,16); Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; II Cor. 13:5), and the Holy Spirit indwells us (Rom. 8:11; II Tim. 1:14). Thereby "God is at work in us" (Phil. 2:13), "Christ is manifested in us" (II Cor. 4:10,11), and we are "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). "Our life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

Throughout his writings, the apostle Paul repeatedly refers to Christians being "in Christ," which I interpret to mean "in *union with* Christ." "By His doing you are in (union with) Christ Jesus" (I Cor. 1:30). "We are seated in the heavenly places in (union with) Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). "Anyone who is in (union with) Christ Jesus, is a new creature" (II Cor. 5:17). And then Paul turns around to use the same preposition to indicate that the very life of the risen and living Lord Jesus is "in" us. "The mystery is Christ in (union with) you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). "Do you not recognize that Jesus Christ is in (union with) you?" (II Cor. 13:5). There is a mutual participatory union, a "personal relational oneness" – the later Latin Christian writers used the phrase *unio cum Christo* – "union with Christ." It is our privilege as Christians to participate in a spiritual union whereby we live out and manifest the Christ-life.

You will recall that I mentioned that the Western church (both Roman Catholic and Protestant) has been very gun-shy about teaching or talking about participation in God or union with Christ. In a very Aristotelian way of thinking, Western theology has kept Jesus detached as an historical figure or a theological idea. In the historical miracle of the resurrection Jesus



rose from the dead, and now sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us in heaven. And we, meanwhile, are to attempt to be “like Jesus,” the ultimate example, by asking “What Would Jesus Do?” I am sure that you have noticed in your own experience, that the Western church is very skeptical of mentioning the “indwelling Christ” and “union with Christ.”

The Eastern Orthodox portion of the church, however, has maintained an emphasis on *theosis* since the earliest centuries of Christianity. The thought of participation with/in God in Christ is the controlling element of their theology, the basis of all Christian salvation. By the term *theosis* they do not mean that Christians become God, or that we are absorbed into the essence of God, but they do mean that there is a real impartation of the divine life to the whole human being in order to have union and communion with God by participating in the life of the risen Christ and the energy of the indwelling Holy Spirit. “Christ is formed in us” (Gal. 4:19), and according to the Eastern Orthodox church there is no legitimate Christian theology apart from such experience.

When God and man participate in “personal relational oneness” there remains the functional dynamic of the Grace/faith interaction of God and man, Christ and the Christian. Man does not become God. The Christian does not become Christ. There is always a distinction in the midst of the union. Neither do we function “as Christ,” except via “the receptivity of His activity” in faith; yet doing all that we do by the dynamic of divine GRACE.

Nor do we want to suggest that this is just an automatic process, a form of triumphalistic victorious Christian living whereby everything we do is just Jesus in action. That is why the illustration shows that Satan remains the tempter who tempts the Christian to misrepresent his/her identity in Christ and manifest character that is contrary to the divine character of Christ, rather than the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22,23), allowing for holiness (II Tim. 1:9; Heb. 12:10; II Thess. 4:7) and godliness (I Tim. 3:16; II Tim. 3:12; II Pet. 1:3).

And yes, we do sometimes succumb to the wiles of the devil and manifest sinful behavioral expressions. “If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us” (I Jn. 1:8). But “in Christ,” we know how to rebound by “confessing our sins” (I Jn. 1:9), and continuing our participation in the mystery of union with God in Christ.

### **What the wisdom of the world thinks of what we say:**

The secular “wisdom of this world” doesn’t have a clue what we are talking about when we refer to “the mystery of participation with, or in, God and Christ. It is “out of their league” of understanding. It is “off their radar screen.” They are unable to understand spiritual realities, and this kind of language is just psycho/spirit babble to their ears.

But the most pathetic situation is that so many so-called evangelical Christians today do not have any more of a clue what we’re talking about when we refer to the “mystery of participation with, and in, God.

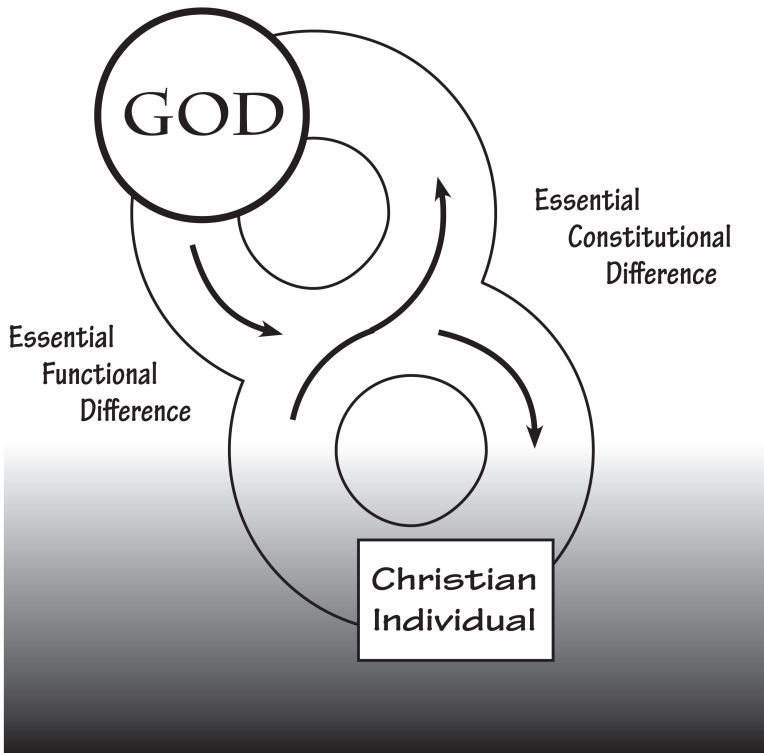
Periodically the preacher might mention that the Christian is “in Christ” (in some fuzzy, ambiguous manner), and even less frequently he/she might refer to Christ being “in us” (occupying our thoughts and feelings perhaps), but real experiential participation and subjective involvement in the interpersonal relations of the triune God – that is strange language to most evangelical Christians.

“Sounds rather mystical,” is a common retort. “You’re not saying that we are God, are you?” No, we reject pantheistic monism, and regard it to be blasphemous to claim to be Christ, but we are affirming what Paul wrote, “those who are joined to the Lord, are *one spirit* with Him” (I Cor. 6:17).

The evangelicals have a “separated concept” of a detached Jesus. When asked, “Where is Jesus right now?” they always reply, “Seated at the right hand of the Father.” Not incorrect, but where is the immanent sense of Jesus’ presence? Paul asked the Corinthians Christians, “Do you not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you, ...unless you believed in vain” (II Cor. 13:5). A detached perspective of Jesus causes Christians to always try to muster up more dedication and commitment and consecration in order to “be like Jesus.”



# The Enigma of the Christian Life





## 8

### The Enigma of the Christian Life

The question: Why is the Christian life so convoluted, so difficult, so impossible to figure out? Why does it seem that life is far more complex after I became a Christian than before I was a Christian?

Topic: The study of what the Christian life is all about is *Sanctification*, otherwise known by the theological term, *Hagiology* – the study of holiness (Greek word for “holy” is *hagios*) – the study of how the Holy character of God is imparted to us in the midst of life’s circumstances and situations.

#### What we say:

A good many Christians seem to think that in becoming a Christian they have “signed on” to the “good-guys club,” and they have their wet ticket (having passed through the baptismal waters) so they can go to heaven when they die. In the meantime they are in the “waiting room” of life, “on hold” as it were, singing, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through ... my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”

Imagine their surprise when they encounter the “enigma of the Christian life.” They seem to have thought that when Jesus promised, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28), that the Christian life

was going to be a peaceful passivism of pious partnering until they reached the pearly gates. The Christian life is anything but such. Someone failed to tell them that Jesus also told His disciples, “In this world you will have tribulation” (Jn. 16:33). James, the Lord’s brother writes, “Count it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (James 1:2).

Within the “personal relational oneness” we have with God in Christ by the Spirit, we still have trials, tribulations, and temptations. God never promised us “smooth sailing on the seas of life” or “membership in God’s red-carpet club.” “Stuff still happens” in the Christian life, for we are not exempt from the “ups and downs” and the “twists and turns” of everyday life.

The illustration of the “enigma of the Christian life” utilizes a figure-eight flow of movement between God and the Christian individual. There remains an “essential constitutional difference” and an “essential functional difference” between God and man, but within the “one spirit” union with God wherein we participate in the life and character of the risen Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit, our experience can be quite enigmatic. There is often bewilderment, uncertainty, and clouded awareness of what God is doing in our lives. Paul says, “we see in a mirror dimly/darkly” (I Cor. 13:12), and we are brought again and again to the awareness that “the ways of God are past finding out” (Rom. 11:33).

The top circle in the diagram obviously represents God, but not in the sense that we are striving to reach God above. The Christian is already “one spirit” with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Christian’s



desire is now to please God, and experientially participate in the expression of God. The God-circle represents the teleological objective of being “man as God intended man to be,” of being the vessels in which God can be and do what He wants to be and do, uniquely and specifically, in us. Christians desire to please God by the behavioral expression of His all-glorious character, for we were “created for His glory” (Isa. 43:7). The God-circle also pictures the experiential peace that “passes all understanding” as we find our rest in Him.

It is also important to point out that God is not to be conceptualized or visualized only at one location on this figure-eight illustration. God is everywhere on the Christian path, both transcendent to the Christian and immanent in spiritual union with the individual Christian.

Despite the admonitions of religion that we are to “live on the straight and narrow” path, the Christian life seems more like this figure-eight, wherein we seem to go “round and round” with “ups and downs” and “twists and turns.” One individual described this pictorial representation of the Christian life as the “process of crazy eights.”

The maddening thing for some Christians is that they never seem to arrive. There is no completion point; where is the finish line? Some have the idea that the goal/objective of the Christian life is to “camp out on the summit” and live in the rarified air of true spirituality “near to God”. Some of Jesus’ disciples had a similar triumphalistic perspective, and wanted to build three

tabernacles on the top of the mountain. But Christian experience is usually more like cresting a hill, and realizing that we are going down the slide. Isn't that how the Christian life seems sometimes? We don't know what is around the next corner, but as was Abraham's experience, it may not be for us to know where we are going, where God is taking us. The apostle Paul explained, "Not that I have already arrived or reached perfection, but I press on towards the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14).

Some have viewed this figure-eight experience as the "Gordian knot" in the process of Christian living. The ancient Greek legend was that King Gordius of Phrygia once tied such a complicated knot that it could not be undone, until Alexander the Great just severed the knot with his sword. Some people see their lives so knotted-up with problems that they think the only solution is the severing of it all with the sword of death. The Christian life may be an enigma, but the solution is not the severance of physical extermination to opt out of life.

If the essence of the Christian life is "salvation," some argue, then why doesn't God just draw us up to His intent? Why doesn't God pull the Christian up to the level of spirituality that He desires, and make us "safe" from all the troubles of life? That sure seems to be what salvation, "making us safe," ought to be is the reasoning of some.

Religion, on the other hand, capitalizes on the task of encouraging Christians to rise up to what God wants in their lives by climbing up to His level. Touting the "how-tos" of performance exertion, religion has people

singing and chanting, “We are climbing, higher, higher ... soldiers of the cross.” The Christian life is often conceptualized as a staircase, or a ladder, or a mountain that must be climbed to achieve God’s will in the “do-right” religion.

Even when we recognize that Christians are to “go with the flow” of God’s grace wherever He might take us, and that as we go round the loops Christ in us is desirous of being the dynamic of all His own demands, that does not mean that we will not descend to encounter the trials/temptations that are “common to man” (I Cor. 10:13). The difficulties, the problems, the unpleasant situations engulf us and threaten to swallow us. Many Christians have testified that they felt like they were buried under the circumstances down in the dark area at the bottom of the diagram, or that they were being drowned by the weight of their habituated fleshly patterns. In contrast to those who might want to take flight in “triumphalism”, there are those who get mired in the “defeatism” of feeling overwhelmed by the difficulties of life. They engage in pity-parties of singing the “poor me blues.” They accept the labeling of being a “victim” of the circumstances. They cry out, “Help, I’ve fallen, and I can’t get up!”

It’s not wrong to be “down,” Paul indicates (II Cor. 4:8,9), but it is contrary to God’s intent to be “down and out” without hope in the sufficiency of God’s grace.” St. John of the Cross (in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) wrote of the *Dark Night of the Soul*, wherein he explains that we are often “in the dark” concerning what God is doing in our lives. Those who cannot see the purpose of God and the grace of God in the tough times of life, often begin to blame

God for their hardships: “If this is the way God treats His people, it’s hardly a wonder that few want to walk with Him.” Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book, *“Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?”* Professor Bart Ehrman (UNC Chapel Hill) jettisoned his Christian faith, writing a book, *“God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer.”* The apostle Paul, on the other hand, shared his quest to “know Him (Jesus), and the power of his resurrection, and the *fellowship of his sufferings*, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:10 – a very different perspective.

But man-made religion cannot understand God’s purposes. It is always devising procedures and techniques with which people might try to avoid the situations of life. Witness the plethora of “deliverance” ministries advocating the means by which to be delivered from problems, to escape the difficulties. So it is that we have Christians trying to “fight their plight,” while others are just constantly complaining, and still others are throwing up their arms in fatalistic resignation (“what goes around comes around, everything comes to pass; *Que sera, sera* – what will be, will be.”)

It is important to understand that our lives may be *everywhere* on this figure-eight at the same time. One might sense that their marital relationship has risen to a level that is glorifying to God; but their financial situation is “on the slide” into the depths of bankruptcy. They are at peace as God’s grace deals with their family dynamics, but the vocational situation they face is diving into the pit, as they were just laid-off at work.

They know God is working in their lives as they revel in their spiritual relationship with Christ, but they were just diagnosed with cancer and are filled with physical concerns. We are never just at one point in the process at any single time – it is far more complex than that.

The enigma of the Christian life is a process that goes around, time and again, through the *dark* times of life into the *Light* of His presence, through times of *weakness* into the appreciation of the *strength* of His grace, through the pain and sorrows of *suffering* into the jubilation of His *joy*, through the agonizing *adversities* until we recognize them as His *adventures*, through the valley of *despair* on the way to the summit of His *delight*, through the diminishment of *death* and dying until we are raised up to enjoy His *resurrection-life*, through the lows of *loneliness* on the way to the delights of *fellowship* with Him and His people, through the depressing *defeats* that allow His sufficient grace to bring *triumph* and victory, through the humbling *humiliations* that only He can turn into elevated *exaltation*, through the “*thorns in the flesh*” unto the “*throne of God.*” We could go on and on.

The Christian life is a bewildering enigma. It is counter-intuitive to the success principles and objectives of the world around us. Where else are you going to find encouragement in such progress-principles as: The way up is down! The way to be exalted is to be humbled! The way to gain is to lose! The way to be strong is to be weak! The way to live is to die! The way out is through! The way to conquer is to surrender! The way to work is to rest! The way to lead is to serve! The way to heaven is through hell!

Let it also be noted that in the midst of the descents of life, when we can identify with the fact that “Jack fell down and broke his crown, and Jill came tumbling after,” Christians should remember that Christ lives in them not for the sole purpose of bringing them to the crest of the hill, to some “peak of spirituality.” Christ always lives in us for OTHERS. The God of LOVE sometimes sends us back down in the descent so that we can “stand in the gap” for OTHERS, so that we might lay down our lives, and invest ourselves, for OTHERS. Christ in us is always desirous of being the Intercessor for OTHERS.

Yes, the enigma of the Christian life is a chicken bone that gets stuck in some people’s throats. Especially when they view these “down” times as *obstacles*, instead of God’s *opportunities* to show us (and others) how His grace is sufficient in this situation *also*. God’s ways may be bewildering, but “His ways are always right” (Hosea 14:9).

### **What the wisdom of the world thinks of what we say:**

Human rationality cannot begin to fathom how God is developing His character expression in His people unto His own glory. The best they can do is to speculate that the trials of life cause an individual to be better and stronger and to self-develop personal character. That being the case, they formulate an instructional program for “character education” to make people better and stronger people – completely antithetical to what we are considering as the “enigma of the Christian life.”

When the natural man observes a Christian accepting the hardships of life without irritation, complaining or anxiety – without the reactions of fight, fright, or flight – most often they conclude that Christians are just developing excuses for the fact that God is not protecting them as they claim that God does. “They’re just resigning themselves to what happens, trying to make God look good.”

But it is the people who call themselves “Christians” who have been force-fed the “religious wisdom of the world,” who are often the most befuddled about the “enigma of the Christian life.” “Where’s the rest in this whirlwind of “ups and downs” and “twists and turns”? “Where’s that ‘victorious Christian life’ that I’ve heard the preachers mention?” “It seems like my life is more convoluted and confusing after I became a Christian, than before.” This doesn’t make sense!





## Conclusion

We have chewed on a few “chicken bones,” and explained that they do not go down easily in the mastication of human reasoning. Should that be a concern to us? Should that bother us? It didn’t seem to bother the apostle Paul that the “wisdom of the world” considered what he preached as “scandalous” or “moronic.”

Taking Paul’s approach, we can respond to the enlightenment mind-set of deified reason:

We sympathize with your inability to understand.  
We recognize that with human logic alone it is not reasonable.

We know that you have a self-defined, self-limited playing-field of empiricism.

But we are convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that we have the “mind of Christ”

(I Cor. 2:16)

We have a spiritual “inner knowing” – from a revelation that is *caught*, not *taught*.

We believe that TRUTH is Person, and that He is spiritually invested, not logically attested.

Can Christian scholars and apologists give answers to the questions posed by these “chicken bones” that will prove satisfactory to the natural mind, and the criteria of human reasoning using logical syllogisms? Not likely! We don’t have to, and all attempts to do so will fall short! We have a “knowing” that they know not of! It is

not a “knowing” of rational information of data propositions. Rather, it is a “knowing” of relational intimacy of divine participation.

That is why the reasonings of apologetics – trying to argue and defend the Christian faith with documentation and logical syllogisms – will seldom (if ever) influence individuals to become Christians. But by the inner voice of revelation, often occasioned by despair, the Spirit can woo and prompt an individual to venture their lives on the Word of God – the *Logos* who is far beyond all human logic.

We have so many people in the churches of America today who have assented to a reasonable package of propositions, and they think they are “Christians” because of their acceptance of and adherence to a “believe-right; do-right” religion, but it is questionable whether they have a clue about the vital dynamic of God living in and working in them by the presence and action of the Spirit of Christ. They are the “clueless in the pews,” those who are being encouraged weekly to discover and convince themselves of the clues of the reasonableness of an unreasonable (humanly speaking) gospel.

Forget about the reasonableness of the gospel. Apologetics is the bastard child of an enlightenment-based evangelicalism – a rabbit trail that ends in a deep, dark rabbit hole!

This is not to say that the Christian faith, as a whole, is not a reasonable faith, for it does have reasonable/reasoned historical foundations and logical theological

formulations.. But when it comes to the faithful receptivity of God's activity in Jesus Christ, human reason is about as beneficial as a splintered crutch that serves little purpose in the Christian walk of faith. We must move beyond the limitations of human reason, unto a vital and intimate faith in the living Lord Jesus.

