

What We Believe about the Human Condition

Romans 5:12-21

April 9, 2017

What do you believe about the Human Condition? Are people essentially good or essentially evil? It seems naïve to say people are essentially good. There is so much evil that people do every day. Criminal activities, global terrorism, etc. People demonstrate their human capacity to do wrong from the time they're 2-years-old and won't share their toys, to the time they cheat on their taxes or cheat on their spouses. On the other hand, it seems negative to say people are essentially evil. After all, there is so much good that people do every day. Soldiers, firefighters, and police officers lay down their lives for others every day. Dads and moms work tirelessly to provide for their children. These kinds of things demonstrate the human capacity to do good. But I'll ask you again. What do you believe about the Human Condition? Are people essentially good or essentially evil?

I've been recommending the Book, *Evangelical Convictions*, as an excellent resource for further study on our church's 10-point Statement of Faith. Listen to what it says about the Human Condition: "...the puzzle of humanity...has a moral dimension. We are capable of acts of great compassion and even heroic virtue. Some even sacrifice their lives to rescue others in peril. Yet some deep stain of corruption still plagues human life. Intellectual and technological sophistication seem to have no effect on our proclivity for evil, to which the horrors of the twentieth century attest. All our lofty ideas and utopian dreams eventually flounder on the rocks of reality. The evidences of the darkness of the human heart are pervasive in human history, yet such darkness still surprises us. Somehow we cannot think of it as merely natural and unavoidable. Something seems to have gone dreadfully wrong. Daniel Migliore sums it up well: 'We human beings are a mystery to ourselves. We are rational and irrational, civilized and savage, capable of deep friendship and murderous hostility, free and in bondage, the pinnacle of creation and its greatest danger. We are Rembrandt and Hitler, Mozart and Stalin, AnTIGone and Lady Macbeth, Ruth and Jezebel.'"¹

Well, today we're going to take a look at Article 3 of our Statement of Faith and what the Bible says about the Human Condition. **1. Being made in God's image shows that the Human Condition is good.** In fact, everything in God's creation is good. Please turn your Bible to Genesis 1. In 1:4 God saw that the light He created was good. In 1:9-10 God created the land and sea and saw that it was good. In 1:12 The land produced vegetation and God saw that it was good. In 1:14-18 God made the sun, moon, and stars and saw they were good. In 1:21 God created the fish and the birds and saw they were good. In 1:25 God made creatures that move along the ground, they were good. Genesis 1:26-27 tells us, "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." In 1:31 God saw all that He made and it was VERY good. God's image shows that the Human Condition is good. Turn to someone next to you and tell them, "You were created in God's image." Every human being is created in God's image. This means that we are meant to be like Him and that humans alone can reflect His holiness and His morality. This makes us unique from all His other creatures. Humans are unique from other animals, being not only physical but also spiritual beings with eternity in our hearts.

Mankind first dwelt in the beautiful Garden of Eden. It was an incredible paradise, "a place of joy and fellowship with God."² We get a very brief, but beautiful, glimpse of this in Genesis 3:8 which tells us that God "was walking in the garden in the cool of the day." Can you picture that? God walking along in the garden, smelling the flowers, listening to the birds, perhaps whistling a song... Pretty incredible to ponder. We are not told just how many days or months or years of sweet fellowship that Adam and Eve enjoyed with God before the fall. But, we do know that they had free

¹ *Evangelical Convictions*, 2011, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, pp. 70-71 which also quoted Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 139.

² See *NIV2011 Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, footnote on Genesis 3:8 on p. 14.

and easy access to the Tree of Life.³ So, hypothetically, they could have enjoyed a hundred years or more with the Lord⁴, each day eating from the tree of life and each day enjoying the rich blessing of close fellowship with their Creator; a creator who enjoyed taking morning walks in the garden. The Garden of Eden was God's original, wonderful design for humans.

Don't miss the ramification of what we are learning here. It is possible to be fully human and completely without sin. Now, that's kind of a radical concept. But, before the fall, Adam and Eve lived out this reality, likely for many years. And, of course, Jesus lived a sinless human life, demonstrating that being human doesn't always require being sinful. We've heard it said, "To err is human." But, life hasn't always been that way. And when we get to heaven, we'll be able to experience an existence APART FROM our sinful nature.

Unfortunately, as we read the rest of Genesis 3, we discover that Adam and Eve ate from the one tree from which they were commanded not to eat. And... **2. Because of sin the Human Condition fell into evil.** It's important to understand that Adam and Eve were real, historical people. There are some more liberal views that shy away from this. But the Evangelical Free Church of America does not and neither should we. This is not just a story to tell our children or grandchildren. The issue of Adam and Eve's historicity is significant.⁵ And, here's why.⁶ If we deny the historical truth that Adam and Eve were real humans, we jeopardize the Gospel message itself. It's nearly impossible to understand the gospel apart from Adam and Eve. How can God be just in punishing sin, if the 2 people who supposedly brought sin into the world, were not actually real people? How can humanity be held responsible for sin if the progenitors of sin were not even real humans?

Romans 5:12-21 sets up a key contrast between Adam and Jesus Christ. It's a pivotal argument for how long-lasting and broad-spread the problem of sin truly is and it clarifies precisely how and why Jesus is the very solution that we need. Romans 5:12, 15, 18-19 teaches us, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned— ...But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ...Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

But, how real was Adam's disobedience if he himself wasn't real? And how much then, would Christ's obedience really matter if the original disobedience was not real? Would humans really deserve death and condemnation? The fact is, the human race stands in union with the real man Adam. This is why 1 Corinthians 15:22 teaches that, "...as in Adam all die..."⁷ The fact of Adam and Eve's existence as the first real people is the framework by which we understand the Human Condition. Understanding who we were created to be and also who we are now as a result of sin, hinges on the veracity of Adam and Eve as real people in our ancestry. The fall into sin in the garden is the cause of evil and suffering in the world today.⁸ We are sinners by nature and by choice. We have inherited our sin problem from Adam and we prove that we are sinners by the daily choices we make to sin; to live our own way rather than God's way. The evidence shows up in our daily lives, so we are all without excuse. And, we are in need of saving.

³ See Genesis 2:9 and 16-17.

⁴ See Genesis 3:22-4:1 and 5:3.

⁵ Here are 2 reasons why: 1) The historical veracity of Adam and Eve is the very starting point for what it means to be human. Our value and dignity have their nexus at the very first man and woman created in God's image. To disregard or belittle this clear and common ancestry unravels human purpose and dignity at its very core. (They are also the starting foundation for the very origin of our existence.) 2) The biblical narrative stands on the fact that these 2 were real people from history. For example, Luke 3:38 places Adam in Jesus' family tree. If Adam is not a real person in history, it casts doubt on whether Jesus was truly human. 1 Corinthians 15:45 draws parallels between the historical 1st Adam as a living being and Jesus the "last Adam" as a life-giving spirit. This is not mere typology, it's comparing the two most real and significant figures in the history of mankind. See also 1 Corinthians 15:22. Also note Acts 17:26.

⁶ Check out talk on the historicity of Adam and Eve with Albert Mohler and Bryan Chapell from April 9, 2013 on the Gospel Coalition website at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/were-adam-and-eve-really-historical-figures>

⁷ Psalm 51:5, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

⁸ In fact, without Adam and Eve, are we not left to wonder then if God just made evil and suffering in his original design? Unraveling the historicity of Adam and Eve unravels a key explanation for the Problem of Evil.

Romans 7:15-25a explains it this way, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” In our present Human Condition, apart from Jesus, we are “not able not to sin.”⁹

In the classic words of the band DC Talk: “The disease of self runs through my blood. It’s a cancer fatal to my soul. Every attempt on my behalf has failed; To bring this sickness under control. Tell me, what’s going on inside of me? I despise my own behavior. This only serves to confirm my suspicions; That I’m still a man in need of a Savior.”¹⁰ This sinful condition leaves us alienated from God and under His wrath. And God is just to alienate us; He was right to kick us out of His garden. He is right to pour out His wrath on sin. This is in keeping with His own holy and perfect nature.¹¹ John Stott puts it this way, “Sin is the revolt of the self against God, the dethronement of God with a view to the enthronement of oneself. Ultimately, sin is self-deification, the reckless determination to occupy the throne which belongs to God alone.”¹²

The Apostle Paul declares this in 1 Timothy 1:15, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” When Levi, the tax collector, decided to follow Jesus, he threw a big party. The religious leaders of his day complained against Jesus, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Mark 2:17 tells us that, “On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”¹³ And that’s why He called me; not because I was spiritually healthy, but because I was spiritually sick. And that’s why he calls you; because you are spiritually sick.¹⁴ 1 John 1:8 says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” The first step in fixing the problem of our Human Condition is admitting our sinfulness. We must turn away from our sin and turn to God.

And here’s The Good News: **3. The Human Condition can be rescued, reconciled, and renewed.** No matter how good you may think that you are, you are not good enough. No matter how evil you may think you are, you are not evil enough to be beyond reach. None of us is too far gone. It’s not too late for you or anyone you know. By God’s grace, the Human Condition of depravity can be cleaned up and human dignity and goodness can be restored.¹⁵ This is how Article 3 ends: “ONLY through God’s saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.” We are totally incapable of rescuing ourselves from our sinful condition. We are entirely at the mercy of God.¹⁶ I like how the book, *Evangelical Convictions*, summarizes this: “To combat this deadly disease of human depravity and the judgment of God which it rightly deserves we need more than positive thinking. New rules or religious rituals will not suffice; moral maxims are worthless; nor will a self-help manual do us any good. In this tragic condition we need a divine Savior—someone who can save us from God’s wrath and renew us in God’s image. Nothing less will do.”¹⁷

⁹ See footnote #26 on p. 78 of *Evangelical Convictions* and footnote #34 on p. 82.

¹⁰ Charlie Peacock “In the Light” performed also by D.C. Talk.

¹¹ Colossians 1:21, “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.”

¹² *Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1994, p. 100.

¹³ See also Luke 5:31-32.

¹⁴ Psalm 130:3-4, “If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.”

¹⁵ *Evangelical Convictions* p. 71.

¹⁶ See discussion on pp. 82-85 of *Evangelical Convictions*.

¹⁷ Bottom of p. 86.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus is our ONLY hope! 1 Corinthians 15:49 highlights a beautiful opportunity for the Human Condition: "And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man [Adam], so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man [Jesus]." Praise God for the hope that we have in Jesus! Jesus came so that we could be rescued, reconciled, and renewed.

Jesus came so that we could be **Rescued**: from wrath and the present evil age. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says, "...Jesus, ...rescues us from the coming wrath." Romans 6:23 tells us that, "... the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Gal. 1:3-4 says, "...Jesus Christ, ...gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age..."

Jesus also came so that we could be **Reconciled**: from our state of alienation, to a right relationship with God.¹⁸ Romans 5:8-10 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were STILL sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For ..., WHILE we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son..." We do not wait to come to God until we can make ourselves righteous. We don't have to get ourselves cleaned up first. Our sin separates us from God; it makes us His enemy. But because of His great love for us, God offers us a way to reconcile with Him through Jesus.

Jesus came so that we could be **Renewed**: in the image of God. Ephesians 4:24 taught us that in Christ we "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."¹⁹ We are God's workmanship and he is kindly and carefully sculpting us more and more into His likeness. He is the skillful potter who is shaping us and renewing us, like lumps of clay, into something good. Colossians 3:5-10 says, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

At the beginning of Holy Week, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. In that Triumphal Entry, He proclaimed that He was a good and humble king. On this Palm Sunday, we need Him to be our Savior. We need Him to be our coming King.

Article 3 reminds us that "We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed."

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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¹⁸ Psalm 51:4, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge."

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians. 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"