

VOLUME II

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

CREATION, FALL, AND SALVATION

General Editors

**NATHAN D. HOLSTEEN
AND MICHAEL J. SVIGEL**

Part One: J. Lanier Burns, Nathan D. Holsteen, and
Michael J. Svigel, with John Adair and Glenn R. Kreider

Part Two: Glenn R. Kreider, with Nathan
D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel



BETHANY HOUSE PUBLISHERS

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel, gen. eds., *Exploring Christian Theology* vol. II
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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Exploring Christian theology : creation, fall, and salvation / Nathan D. Holsteen & Michael J. Svigel, general editors ; contributing writers, John A. Adair and J. Scott Horrell ; volume writers, part one, J. Lanier Burns, Nathan D. Holsteen, and Michael J. Svigel, part two, Glenn R. Kreider, with Michael J. Svigel.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "Dallas Theological Seminary professors make basic Christian theology accessible for everyone, including key doctrines on Creation, the Fall, and salvation. Part of a complete three-volume set"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-7642-1131-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Creation. 2. Fall of man. 3. Salvation—Christianity. 4. Bible—Theology.

5. Theology, Doctrinal. I. Holsteen, Nathan D., editor. II. Title: Creation, fall, and salvation.

BT695.E97 2015

230—dc23

2014043022

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Scripture quotation marked KJV is from the King James Version of the Bible.

Cover design by Brand Navigation

The authors are represented by The Steve Laube Agency.

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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INTRODUCTION

For some people, the word *doctrine* summons yawns of tedium, shudders of trepidation, or frowns of suspicion. Dogmatic preachers exasperate them, feuding denominations weary them, and droning scholars bore them.

When people hear the word *theology*, the condition sometimes worsens. They picture massive tomes packed with technical discussions, less-than-crucial data, and incomprehensible footnotes—unusable information to distract them from God rather than drawing them nearer.

Most people seeking to grow in their faith want practical principles, not theoretical concepts. They want to *know* God, not just know *about* Him.

Yet the fact is that we can't experience real spiritual growth without solid spiritual truth. We can't know the true God without knowing God truly.

In that case, where do we start? How do we begin to harvest in this fruitful field without getting caught in the tangled underbrush of mere opinions and idiosyncrasies? How can we sort through what seem like countless contradictory theories to find the essential truths necessary for strengthening and living out our faith?

Exploring Christian Theology will offer introductions, overviews, and reviews of key orthodox, protestant, evangelical tenets without belaboring details or broiling up debates. The three *ECT* volumes, compact but substantial, provide accessible and convenient summaries

of major themes; they're intended as guidebooks for a church that, overall, is starving for the very doctrine it has too-long avoided.

Each volume includes primary biblical texts, a history of each main teaching, relevant charts and graphs, practical applications, and suggestions for literature that you might want to have in your own library. And one of our goals for this work is to offer help to those who haven't read much in the way of theology. So we've included a glossary of terms—the unusual and the significant. If at any point you see an unfamiliar word or wonder about a definition, consider taking a moment to check that list. In a similar vein, you can look at the table of contents for a straightforward and organized glimpse of what's to come.

Further, each part or section (e.g., this volume has two parts) can stand alone—be read or referenced on its own. Or you can study through all the sections related to one “region” of theology and walk away with a handle on its biblical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions. In other words, these books can be used in a number of ways, suitable to your particular needs or interests.

Exploring Christian Theology differs from other mini-theologies in that it strives to present a broad consensus, not a condensed systematic model of one evangelical teacher or protestant tradition. Thus, you might use these volumes for discipleship, catechism, membership training, preview or review of doctrine, or personal reference. Like the evangelical movement itself, we seek to be orthodox and interdenominational within a classic consensus.

Treat each volume as a simple primer that supplements (not supplants) more detailed treatments of theology—that complements (not competes with) intermediate and advanced works. As such, regardless of denominational or confessional commitments, these books likewise can be used by ministry training programs, Bible colleges, or seminaries for students preparing to undertake in-depth study. Whatever your background, degree of interest, or level of expertise, we hope this volume won't be the end of a brief jaunt but the beginning of a lifelong journey into—or a helpful aid alongside your ongoing immersion in—the exciting world of Christian theology.

Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Svigel
General Editors

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though this volume is the second in the *Exploring Christian Theology* series, it actually was the last one written, edited, and published. After laboring hard over its contents, trying to strike that very difficult balance between too much and too little . . . too technical and too basic . . . too serious and too corny—we feel we’ve produced what might be Goldilocks’s favorite set.¹ At this end point in the project, then, we want to thank those who have served as guides, companions, and supporters in our own explorations of Christian theology over the course of many years:

Charles C. Ryrie, who taught us that theology didn’t need to be so complicated; Craig A. Blasing, who made us think and rethink how to do what we do; D. Jeffrey Bingham, who urged excellence in scholarship and fortitude in conviction; John D. Hannah, who showed us that history too can be fun; and the theological studies department’s administrator, Beth Motley, who cares for us with patience, kindness, and the heart of a saint—like a mother taking care of her own (wearying and irritating) children (1 Thess. 2:7).

The editors of this volume and series also wish to thank, once again, our agent, Steve Laube, for helping us massage this project; Tim Peterson, formerly of Bethany House, for championing it from the beginning; Andy McGuire, for his patience and perseverance to the end; Christopher Soderstrom, whose insight and editorial skill has saved us from not a few errors and general confusion; and Julie Smith, Stacey Theesfield, Elisa Tally, Brett Benson, Hannah Carpenter, Nancy Renich, and the rest of the helpful staff at Bethany House for their tireless efforts in the editing, designing, publishing, and promoting process for all three volumes of *Exploring Christian Theology*.

THE CHRISTIAN STORY IN FOUR ACTS

“The plot thickens!”

When somebody utters those words in restrained exuberance, finally, *something*’s happening in the story. In the course of what seemed to have been slow, predictable, humdrum drama, something intriguing, unforeseen, perhaps even tragic has occurred. A pivotal event changes the action’s trajectory . . . a key player suddenly arrives or departs . . . a shocking revelation staggers characters and audience alike . . . or an ominous foreshadowing creates a new tension that promises, sooner or later, to deliver much more.

Writers call these moments “plot twists.” A skillful writer will redirect a narrative several times during its unfolding. In fact—in general—the more twists and turns, ups and downs, defeats and victories, the better. Successful storytelling never lumbers from points A to B in a straight line but accelerates and brakes, veers right and veers left. Good stories bring audiences on a ride that stimulates their senses. They stir imaginations. They tug at emotions.

And, many of the best twists involve agonizing loss or seemingly insurmountable challenges that can be endured, solved, or overcome only by superhuman intervention.

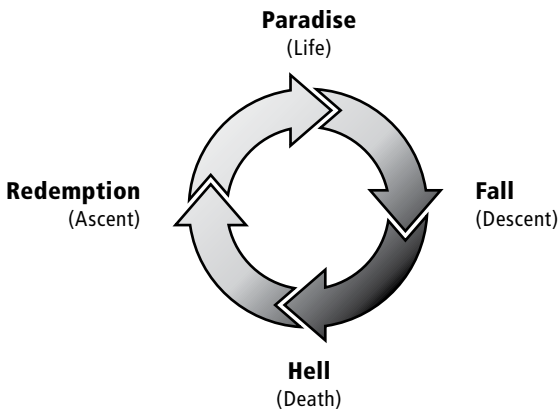
Enter the hero: the one who, by cultivated virtue—often tested and strengthened through great suffering—is able to set straight what was twisted.

When we explore Christian theology, we come to recognize that God’s story actually flows much like a classic “hero cycle.”¹ It involves the twists and turns of Paradise and fall, death and redemption,

promise and fulfillment, anticipation and satisfaction. With this same foundational pattern, storytellers throughout history have gripped their audiences by tapping into universal experiences—elements common to most or all individuals and cultures:

- an experience of personal conflict between good and evil
- frustration with the present world
- anxieties about the future
- a sense of a greater purpose and meaning
- the conviction that this world isn't the way it's supposed to be
- the hope that things will one day be better than they are

A Typical Hero Cycle

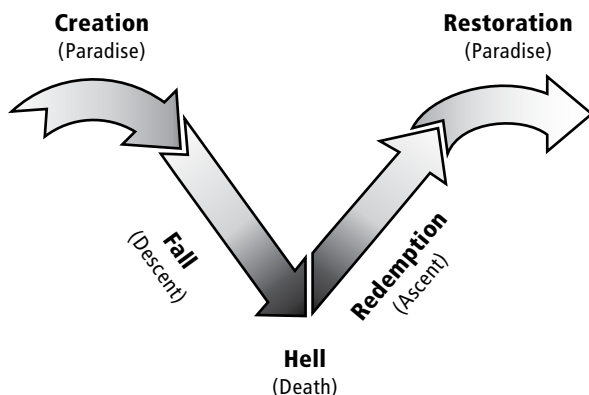


Our well-known stories of initiation, fall, struggle, testing, redemption, and ultimate victory put into words, portray on stage, or project on screen the unconscious realities we feel in our hearts. Our favorite movies or books are favorites because they touch on themes related to this cycle that resonate with our experiences. They “speak” to us, inviting us to enter into a larger story that transcends our lonely individualism and our deteriorating world.²

Reminiscent of the hero cycle (with some astonishing twists), the chronicle of the classic Christian faith is a captivating account that

can be summed up in four acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

God's Story: From the Garden to Glory



Act I: Creation

If a composer were to write a score for the Old Testament, what kind of musical motifs would he or she employ? Gentle harps and melodic strings? Majestic trumpets? Delightful woodwinds or pounding drums? Through whatever means, the theme would probably begin with a burst of symphonic grandeur, followed by a flourish of interwoven melodies signifying the creation of heaven and earth in glorious perfection.

As this bold overture resolved into a blissful ballad, however, a dark and ominous minor chord would slither into the melody to turn the key from major to minor. Perhaps oboes and bassoons would replace flutes and piccolos; enter bass drums for xylophones; cellos and basses for violins and harps; tubas for trumpets. We'd hear harsh, discordant notes.

Even so, amid this cacophony, hints of the original beauty, majesty, and power would occasionally break through, promising to reemerge and eventually, ultimately, to triumph.

What, in words, is the theme of the Old Testament? *The tragic fall of a perfect creation followed by judgment and the promise of final redemption.*

Genesis 1–2 stunningly depicts the original creation of the heavens, the earth, all living things, and humankind. The story begins not with competing deities or an absolute nothingness but with *God*: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1). God, through His eternal Son and Spirit, created everything that exists—whether things in heaven or things on earth, things “visible and invisible.”³ The triune God is the Author, Producer, Director, and leading Actor in the story of creation and redemption. And, as Master Storyteller, He has made himself known through His works (Ps. 19:1–2) and through His Word (2 Tim. 3:16). He both shows and tells His power, His plan, and His purpose. Simply put, the great and mighty God is knowable and has made himself known: Hebrews 1:1–2 says,

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

As the crowning work of His creation, God made humans, male and female, co-regents over what He had made with a mandate to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). God desired to share the stage of His production with creatures He formed from mud, transforming dust into stars (Ps. 8:3–6). They were created in the image of God—that is, reflecting His glory and character and destined to rule as His representatives over creation (Gen. 1:26–30). As God’s image-bearing envoys, humans were to work in the Paradise of Eden, cultivating it and ultimately extending its borders to cover the entire uncultivated earth (Gen. 2:7–25).

Act II: Fall

Alas, that state of pure innocence would not last. As intelligent creatures given free will, the first humans succumbed to temptation and turned their backs on their Creator, forfeiting their role as His rulers over earth and falling victim to sin and death (Gen. 3). The blast wave of this disobedience resounds forward throughout all human history, its devastating effects illustrated in Genesis 4–11: murder, anarchy,

destruction, and then rebellion against God. Everybody today will admit that something is wrong with the world and with the people in it. As Ecclesiastes says, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and who never sins” (7:20), and “The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives” (9:3 NASB).

Thus half of the story cycle is complete—from Paradise and life, through tragic fall, to an earthly state of living condemnation, and then universal death.

Act III: Redemption

If we were to commission the same composer to score a New Testament sequel to the Old Testament part of the story, what kind of themes would we want? How does the continuation of His-story in the New Testament relate to its beginnings in the Old?

The sequel’s score would probably look like a mirror image of the initial themes. From darkness to light, from fall, judgment, and promises delayed to promises fulfilled, mercy and grace extended, and redemption realized. Discordant notes and chords would be replaced by a symphony of instruments and voices singing praises to our God and King. The nearly forgotten opening scenes of the prequel would be restored and then surpassed.

What, then, is the theme of the New Testament? *The long-awaited redemption of a fallen creation, followed by the restoration and fulfillment of all God’s promises and purposes.*

God did not abandon humankind to hopelessness. Already in Genesis 3, after the fall of Adam and Eve, He pledged that the offspring of the woman would bruise the Serpent’s head, ultimately destroying sin and evil (v. 15). He then advanced His plan of redemption through the calling of Abraham (Gen. 12), to whom He promised that a particular offspring would mediate blessings to the world (Gen. 13:15; Gal. 3:15–16). After the promise passed from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob to the tribe of Judah, it then narrowed to the dynasty of King David. In Isaiah’s famous prophecy, this same promise of a Redeemer is narrowed to an individual coming king, the Messiah:

The people who walk in darkness
 Will see a great light;
 Those who live in a dark land,
 The light will shine on them. . . .
 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
 And the government will rest on His shoulders;
 And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty
 God,
 Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of
 peace,
 On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
 From then on and forevermore.
 The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isa. 9:2,
 6–7 NASB)

The redemption plan continued to be revealed throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. Despite human failures—even of those to whom He'd given amazing guarantees of His presence and love—God remained faithful to His promises, ultimately sending the promised Offspring—His own divine Son (John 3:16).

When God's Son was about to enter the redemption story as a man, God sent the angel Gabriel to confirm that this child, born to a poor family from an insignificant village, was the One through whom the ancient promises would be fulfilled:

You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name
 Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most
 High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;
 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom
 will have no end. (Luke 1:31–33 NASB)

As the plot unfolded, though, God's narrative took a world-shaking turn. Instead of following the cycle's upward path—the Hero passes through trials, endures setbacks, and overcomes failures while pressing on toward His reward—God's Chosen One *retraced the descent*, surrendering His life to the executioner. The only being in human history who deserved never-ending life with God voluntarily suffered a brutal death (Phil. 2:5–8).

Even this ironic fate had been foretold in the prophecies of Isaiah:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him. (Isa. 53:4–6 NASB)

Nevertheless, for God's matchless Hero, death was not the end. Against all expectations—including those of His despairing followers—Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the grave and stepped out of the tomb more than alive—He was *glorified*. Having died in a mortal body susceptible to sickness, pain, and death, He was raised in a physical but immortal body, incapable of illness, impervious to hurt, and overflowing with eternal life.

Furthermore, through Jesus, God began writing His-story's final chapter. Those people who became united with Christ by placing their faith in Him could now partake of His glory, sharing the Hero's reward and surpassing even the original purpose for humankind that God had established ages ago in Eden.

The Hero's victorious reentrance into the halls of heaven opened a new chapter in God's unfolding drama. After the resurrected Savior's ascension, and prior to His in-the-end return as Judge and King, He sent His Spirit to stir the hearts of His former enemies and call them to His cause. Countless converts from every nation, tribe, people, and language have been and still are flocking to His side (Rev. 7:9–10). Through spiritual union with their King, this kingdom-in-the-making also experiences a spiritual communion in the church. Through this spiritual-physical community of the life-giving Spirit, centered on Jesus Christ's person and work and focused on the glory of God the Father, members of Christ's body grow in faith, hope, and love. Together they become more and more like Jesus their King, the Spirit

working in them to carry out the Father's redemptive mission in this still-fallen world.⁴

Act IV: Restoration

This brings us to the final resolution, the future restoration of the original creation. In the beginning, humans were expelled from Eden, unable to experience immortality in a Paradise free from suffering, frustration, fear, and death. At the present time, God, through Christ and by the Spirit, is calling to himself a people who will participate in His drama's final chapter. When Jesus returns and renews all things, creation's groaning will be turned to glory as the entire earth is transformed into a new, even better Eden, and all those who've been united with Christ will be made like Him (1 John 3:2).

Revelation 21:3–4 describes the glorious coming reality:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away. (NASB)

Thus, between Genesis and Revelation—from the Garden to Glory—God's unparalleled story unfolds. Every person and event moves history and humanity *forward* toward a final goal—restoration. God's grand narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration truly satisfies our restless longings for purpose and meaning, and it fulfills our heart's desire for acceptance in meaningful relationship. Augustine once prayed, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."⁵

The timeless story also provides an ultimate answer to human injustice and inequality, as Christ's kingdom will be an eternal golden age of peace and prosperity for all (Isa. 11:1–9). Likewise, it offers vital, unshakable hope to those who are hurting, lonely, and lost. The concrete promises and detailed visions God has preserved for us throughout the Scriptures provide healing hope to those struggling with anxiety, fear, despair, and depression. When a person's gaze is drawn from his or her current temporary groaning to the certainty

of future everlasting glory through resurrection and restoration, the words of the apostle Paul ring true:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Rom. 8:18–25 NASB)

The good news about God's story is that anybody can become a part of it. Jesus of Nazareth is truly God in the flesh; He truly died and was raised from death, and He truly offers a new identity and new future for all who trust in Him alone for salvation. And those who embrace by faith the Hero of this story will have a share in the restoration of all things.

He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son." (Rev. 21:5–7 NASB)

You Are *Here*

This volume's two parts present the great drama's first three acts: creation, fall, and redemption. The plot thickens as Adam and Eve, God's handmade protagonists, plunge themselves and all their descendants into utmost tragedy. However, in a glorious twist, the Author himself enters the very world He wrote into existence and becomes

the central Hero. Through Him, not only are the lost saved but also the story itself is restored to what He intended.

In Part One, “From Dust to Dust:” Creation, Humanity, and the Fall, the original perfect creation, including the first humans, crumble under temptation and collapse under sin. Yet instead of leaving them to wallow in helplessness and hopelessness, God shines a beacon of promise and hope from a distant lighthouse, beckoning the lost to return and find refuge in His safe harbors.

In Part Two, “Wise Unto Salvation:” Gospel, Atonement, and Saving Grace, onto the scene arrives the Hero: Jesus Christ, God’s Son. He will rescue sinners from their sin, call them to a forgiven and fruitful present, and, by His Spirit, guarantee their immeasurably wondrous future.

Exploring the biblical, theological, and historical foundations of the doctrines of humanity and the fall (anthropology and hamartiology), and of salvation (soteriology), we’ll come to better understand our own place in God’s unfolding story.

PART ONE

“FROM DUST TO DUST”

Creation, Humanity, and the Fall

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HIGH-ALTITUDE SURVEY

Every kid who's been to Sunday school knows that Genesis 1 and 2 describe God's creation of everything from day and night to birds and fish . . . from sun and moon to Adam and Eve. Those children also learned about the temptation of the serpent, the eating of the forbidden fruit, and the resultant expulsion from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3).

But the epic of the creation and the fall isn't confined to the first few chapters of Genesis. These central themes are carried throughout the Bible, until the final consummation in the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21. Then the paradise of God is restored, the curse of sin and death banished, and redeemed humanity is finally able to be all it was meant to be from the beginning.

Everything, Out of Nothing, for Someone and Something

If people ask, "Why does anything exist?" or "Why is there something instead of nothing?" our response can start as the Bible's does: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Creation is the art of the Artist, designed to reveal reality. And because the Artist is the ultimate Good, His creation was originally "very good" (1:31).

When we put together the story of creation, we see that all things exist by the will of God the Father, through the mediating word of God the Son, by the agency of God the Holy Spirit.¹ The universe didn't pop into being via random processes, and it isn't careening

without purpose toward nothingness. Rather, “from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom. 11:36).

This biblical understanding should inspire us to worship the Creator—and Him alone—who is enthroned above His work. He is the sovereign Director of the course of history toward the fulfillment of His will. From Genesis through Revelation, God’s creation points to His power and attributes (Rom. 1:20). It prompts wonder and awe at His incomparable majesty (Ps. 8:1–9). It provokes a posture of faith (Heb. 11:3). It promotes worship even among the mightiest of creatures around His throne in heaven (Rev. 4:11).

So the Bible’s teaching on creation does more than answer, “Where’d all this come from?” It also points us to the Maker; it reveals His existence and His character;² it shows His providence and sovereignty; and explains the orderliness of existence, from microscopic cells to planetary orbits. His very *vastness* should leave us speechless before Him (Job 38:1–42:6).

In short, *God created everything, out of nothing, for someone and something.*

Humanity as the Crowning Work of God’s Creation

Ancient polytheists held that humans were slaves amid chaos, subject to the will and whims of squabbling deities. On the other hand, modern academics often regard “the human animal” as essentially a fortunate accident. Whether we’re too small or the universe is too big, in these views humans can’t have real meaning, purpose, or significance.³

The Christian teaching about humankind is a worldview apart from such pessimistic perspectives. According to the Bible, men and women were created in God’s image and according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26–27). This establishes their uniqueness among all God’s creatures, from angels to earthworms. The divine image includes a distinctive nature and purpose. As God’s image-bearing co-regents on earth, humans were to cultivate Eden and extend the worship of God over the uncultivated earth (2:7–25).

In opposition to the classic Christian doctrine of God’s special creation of humanity in His image (*imago Dei*), the theory of naturalistic evolution seeks to understand and explain human origins apart from

God.⁴ It assumes that humans evolved from a common ancestor by a process called natural selection, more informally known as “survival of the fittest.”⁵ This often-atheistic theory, which today dominates academic and scientific institutions,⁶ reduces humanity to the status of a more complicated animal, distinguishable from even the single-celled amoeba only by degree, not by nature.

In naturalistic evolution, humanity is a comma in nature’s endlessly rambling filibuster. Conversely, in God’s Word, humanity is the exclamation point at the climax of His purposeful, ordered creation account. Humans, made for loving relationships with God and with others, have inherent dignity. They’re more than merely matter; they have an immaterial aspect that distinguishes them from other earthly creatures.

Our take on these two competing versions of human origins—the natural and the supernatural—profoundly impacts how we approach contemporary moral issues like abortion, genetic engineering, artificial reproduction, and euthanasia. Simply put, if humans are only natural products of random processes, then we’re peasant subjects in the kingdom of chaos. But if humans are the crowning work of God’s purposeful creation, then we’re princes and princesses of the King of the cosmos.

We’ve Fallen, and We Can’t Get Up!

Back in the early ’90s a company ran a TV ad for a device worn around the neck that a person could use to call a dispatch service in an emergency if they couldn’t reach a phone. In the dramatization, an elderly woman falls in the bathroom, presses the device, and yells, “I’ve *fallen*, and I *CAN’T GET UP!*”

In this case, the acting was perceived to be so bad that the line became a pop-culture punch line. However, anyone who has experienced a debilitating fall or has helped someone who has been injured in a fall knows it isn’t a laughing matter. Falls among the elderly or disabled aren’t only dangerous, they can be deadly.

The reality is, humanity as a whole has fallen, and to such an extent that we can’t get up without divine help. But as with those who mocked the elderly woman’s fall, “enlightened” modern minds scoff

at the notion that a fallen nature has rendered humans wicked. They would much prefer to regard themselves as basically good with a few bad habits or occasional missteps. They’re scandalized by the biblical teaching that the sinful human condition applies to what they see as trivial imperfections and even gross crimes.

If God created humanity “very good” (Gen. 1:26–31), then clearly something happened that resulted in the wickedness, corruption, suffering, and death so prevalent on earth. This is the fact of humanity’s fall, and with it all creation over which they had been placed as God’s image-bearing co-regents. This sad truth is taught from Genesis to Revelation . . . with the Savior, Jesus Christ, as its only answer (1 Tim. 2:5).

Now, if God is good, and He created heaven and earth good, and humans good and innocent, then where did evil come from? Throughout history, most Christians have understood Satan to be the leader of a force of demons who wage war against God’s forces in heaven and on earth (Eph. 6:12). Likely sometime before God’s creation of all things out of nothing and the human fall (Gen. 3), angelic beings fell from their original good and holy condition. According to classic interpreters, Satan and a host of angelic beings rebelled against God in heaven, becoming humanity’s evil adversaries (Ezek. 28:12–16). Satan deceived and tempted the mother and father of humankind and instigated a history of evil in God’s creation (1 Cor. 15:21–22; 2 Cor. 11:3).

In Adam and Eve’s uncomplicated decision to abdicate their position as rulers over God’s creatures, all the aspects of sin are present: unbelief, disobedience, and ultimately pride. In the words of Bruce Waltke,

The refusal to bow to God’s rule in order to establish one’s own rule is rooted in pride, the essence of sin. The human quest for autonomy—to be independent from God’s revealed Word—was, is, and always will be the primary issue.⁷

The consequences of man’s fall match the gravity of God’s prohibition. The Creator had formed man from the dust of the earth, so to dust man would return (Gen. 3:19). This involved separation from the source of life, the breath of the Creator. The separation also

reflected Adam and Eve's guilt before God and showed in their shame before each other (v. 10).

The sin of the first couple was representative: they led all humanity—as their descendants and heirs of their nature—into bondage to rebellion and the ways of death (Rom. 5:12). Our self-destructive sins also affect the lives of family, friends, peers, and society. In place of Eden, the fall bequeathed a wasteland of thorns and thistles with consequent unrest, sorrow, and death. Strife in families became conflict between families and development into war and oppression in the whole human family:

Human history came to be branded with a stamp of enmity toward God. This event has the character of a “Fall,” that is of a falling out of the line of development willed by God, and, as the subsequent narrative shows, exerts a determining influence on the spiritual attitude of all men.⁸

Sin has corrupted every human being to the extent that desire for independence from God creates self-derived standards and compelling inner drives that take us further and further astray.

A Light in the Darkness

The 9/11 terrorist attacks ranged from Manhattan to the Pentagon to rural Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where heroic passengers aborted Flight 93 before it could extend the horror to Washington, D.C. It illustrated humankind's depravity as well as its dignity. Perhaps more so than any other event, for the present generation it showed the depths to which people can sink.

“*Allahu Akbar!*” ensured that fanatical falsehood would be at the center of the age of terror. Evil turned our most advanced civilian planes into human-directed missiles, a melding of theological perversion and technological prowess. The result was a string of somber services for 2,996 people, and 1.62 million tons of wreckage in New York alone. People from all over the world had been murdered.

Amid all the desperation, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice shared a timely prayer: “I ask, God, that I walk in Your way and not my own.”⁹

And one statement of God’s way is found in John 16:33: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

As we turn to Scripture to investigate creation, humanity, and the fall, it’s our prayer that no one would think of fallenness, depravity, and sin as a problem that, in any sense, “they” have. The biblical story is that humankind, created good, has—in its entirety—fallen into sinful opposition to God. As a consequence, this is *my* problem. This is *your* problem. *Our* problem.

The story is sobering. Depressing, even. And yet that dark backdrop will be the setting for the glorious hope found only in Christ. To God alone be the glory!