

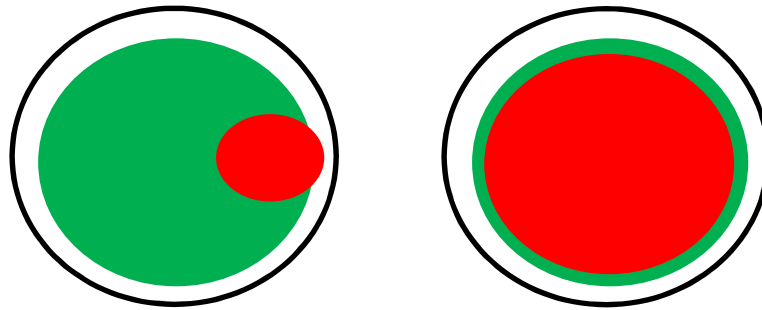


Chapter 1: Your True Self and True Desires, from God's Perspective

Exercise #1: How Do I Experience Myself?

Below are two diagrams of how people experience themselves.

- On the left is the 'guilt-based person.' This person says, 'I'm fundamentally *good*. I can be open with other people because I believe I'm likable. I do have some problems on the side, but they don't define me. And besides, who doesn't have problems? But I can improve myself, and so can we all. We can shrink our problems by ourselves.'
- On the right is the 'shame-based person.' This person says, 'I'm fundamentally *bad*. It's not just that I *make* mistakes, but that I *am* a mistake. I fear people knowing the true me. So I project a mask, a façade of goodness, in order to hide my true self.'



Discussion Questions:

- Which diagram do you relate to more?
- How would relationships work for either person?



Exercise #2: What is God’s Perspective on Us?

Below is an autobiographical, spiritual statement from the Christian missionary and church planter Paul. In it, he is reflecting on his experience of himself before he came to believe in Jesus. It is important to know that Paul had been an upstanding Jew who outwardly upheld Jewish law and tradition with scrupulous zeal (Philippians 3:1 – 6). Yet, he looks back to his pre-Christian Jewish days (Romans 7:8 – 25), and says that inwardly, he experienced ‘every kind’ of lust and jealousy (i.e. ‘coveting’):

⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead...

Then, Paul explains his inner conflict over this. To show this more clearly, we can place his statements into a table:

‘I myself’	‘Sin which indwells me’
¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it,	
	but sin which dwells in me. ^{18a} For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh
^{18b} for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not...	
	²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me
²¹ me, the one who wants to do good... ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free	
	from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God,	
	but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.



Discussion Questions

- How might Paul diagram himself according to Romans 7?

- Paul says in v.18, 'The willing [of the good] is present in me.' Paul believed that each person was made 'in the image of God,' according to Genesis 1:26 – 28. Of the list of desires, below, which do you think Paul would say are the good and godly desires that he felt were in him? Desire for...

Money	Goodness	Truth	Aggression	Significance
Fame	Justice	Intimacy	Pornography	Health
Beauty	Control	Friendship	Attention	Appreciation
Being Better Than Others	Power Over Others	Power to Deceive	Hallucinogenic Drugs	Honoring Others

- Paul also speaks of 'sin' as a corruption, a foreign element in his being, an alien that had somehow infected him.
 - Why do you think Paul experienced covetousness (lust, jealousy) as the persistent evil desire?
 - How can the desire for good things (from the above), or the desire to be good, be partly motivated by jealousy of others?
 - How can the desire for evil things (from the above) be partly motivated by the desire for something good, but in a way that is twisted and misdirected?

How does this practically apply to us?

- I have seen people give their lives to Jesus when I've talked about how we desire to live in a happy ending story (where good triumphs over evil, where a hero triumphs over a villain). God triumphs over evil, and God is the hero who actually triumphs over us as villains by healing human nature, first in Jesus, and then in us, by connecting us to Jesus spiritually. In fact, some college students who were Buddhist, and one who was Hindu, recognized that their belief systems were not happy ending stories (they are circular, with no happy ending) so they gave their lives to Jesus to live in the Christian happy ending story. Using the paradigm above, why do you think this might be?

- I have also seen people give their lives to Jesus while on spring break service trips, when they are building homes for Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans, post-Hurricane Katrina, and trying to understand the history of racial injustice. Why do you think this might be?



- In the introduction, I narrated a story where a desire for pornography is actually a desire for God, but misdirected. So one major internal choice and struggle is to redirect fallen desires. What do you think about this approach?
- When you feel like Scripture, or someone, challenges you to ‘hold back’ a sinful desire in yourself, does that feel like suppressing you as a person? How else might you interpret that challenge?
- Compare what Paul says to what Batman says: ‘But it’s not who I am underneath, it’s what I *do* that defines me.’ (*Batman Begins*, 2005) Does Paul think his actions totally define him?



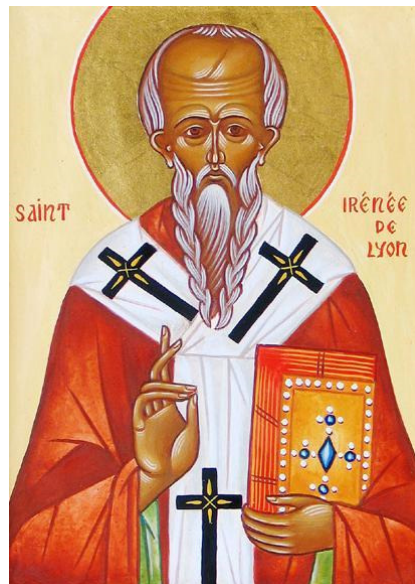
Exercise #3: Read and Reflect

Some of us may come from a family or cultural background where we were told we were worthless, or worth much less than our community, tribe, or nation. Others of us may come from a church background where we were told we were fundamentally resistant to God, and our desires are not worth exploring. Below are four quotations: three from early Christian theologians, and one from a modern theologian. Observe how they read Scripture and perceive God's connection to the human person and human desires.

Discussion Questions

- Does anything surprise you about these four quotations?
- What passages of Scripture are they referring to? Why do those passages seem to be important?
- Why does Sarah Coakley (the 4th quote) refer to Sigmund Freud? Is that important for us?

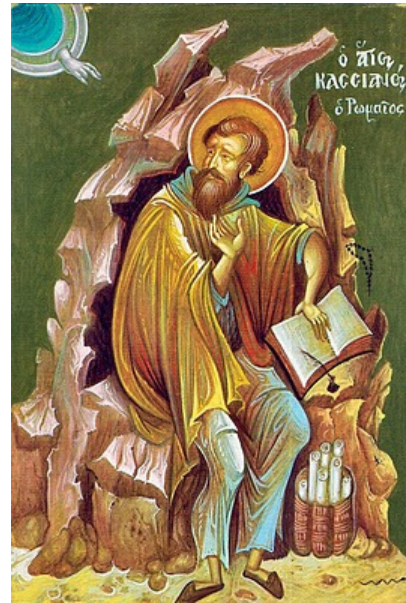
Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (130 – 202 AD), was mentored by Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who was mentored by the apostle John. The Gnostics claimed that Jesus' body was a kind of illusion. In response, Irenaeus wrote the first systematic theological treatise, *Against Heresies*, to explain why Jesus took on true humanity and a real human body. Irenaeus is also very important because he shows the awareness of the apostles' writings in the early church: He was the first to explicitly quote from all four Gospels, and every New Testament book except 3 John and Philemon.



‘God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God...
Man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God [Genesis 1:26 – 28], the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, *and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One.*
For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God.’¹

¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.37.1; cf. 4.38.3; ‘God has always preserved free will and self-government in man’ 4.15.2; ‘Inasmuch, then, as the Spirit of God pointed out by the prophets things to come, forming and adapting us beforehand for the purpose of our being made subject to God...’ (4.20.8).

John Cassian (360 – 435 AD) was a founder of Christian monasticism in Western Europe. He founded two monasteries in Marseilles, France, one for men and one for women. Pope Leo the Great (just prior to becoming Pope) asked him to write a defense of orthodox Christian faith against a heresy of that time, now titled *On the Incarnation of the Lord*. John Cassian also corrected Augustine of Hippo for teaching that God applies His grace to only some.



‘It cannot then be doubted that there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul implanted by the kindness of the Creator: but unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain to an increase of perfection...’

And therefore the will always remains free in man, and can either neglect or delight in the grace of God.

For the Apostle would not have commanded saying:

‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling’ [Philippians 2:13]

had he not known that it could be advanced or neglected by us.

But that men might not fancy that they had no need of Divine aid for the work of Salvation, he subjoins: *‘For it is God that works in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.’*

And therefore he warns Timothy and says:

‘Neglect not the grace of God which is in Thee,’ [1 Timothy 4:14] and again:

‘For which cause I exhort thee to stir up the grace of God which is in thee...’ [2 Timothy 1:6]²

² John Cassian, *Conferences* 13.12

John of Damascus (675 – 749 AD) was the first Christian theologian who lived under Arab Muslim rule. He was the chief financial officer of Caliph Abdul Malek. He is acknowledged as brilliant, well-read, and the theologian who gave a beautiful summary of Christian theology in the Greek-speaking world up until that point. That work is called *An Exposition of the Christian Faith*.



*‘Bear in mind, too, that virtue is a gift from God implanted in our nature,
and that He Himself is the source and cause of all good,
and without His co-operation and help we cannot will or do any good thing.
But we have it in our power either to abide in virtue and follow God,
Who calls us into ways of virtue,
or to stray from paths of virtue, which is to dwell in wickedness,
and to follow the devil who summons but cannot compel us.
For wickedness is nothing else than the withdrawal of goodness,
just as darkness is nothing else than the withdrawal of light.
While then we abide in the natural state we abide in virtue,
but when we deviate from the natural state, that is, from virtue,
we come into an unnatural state and dwell in wickedness.’³*

³ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* book 2, chapter 30

Sarah Coakley (1951 – present) is an Anglican theologian who initially focused on the philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, feminist theology, and modern theologians. Partway through her career, however, she shifted her focus to the early church. She currently is the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, where she holds the established chair in philosophy of religion.



‘Freud [who believed that our most basic desires are sex and aggression]
must be – as it were – turned on his head.

It is not that physical ‘sex’ is basic and ‘God’ ephemeral;
rather, it is God who is basic,
and ‘desire’ the precious clue that ever tugs at the heart,
reminding the human soul – however dimly – of its created source.

Hence... *desire is more fundamental than ‘sex.’*

*It is more fundamental, ultimately, because desire is an ontological category
belonging primarily to God, and only secondarily to humans
as a token of their createdness ‘in the image.’*

But in God, ‘desire’ of course signifies no *lack* – as it manifestly does in humans.

Rather, it connotes that plenitude of longing love that God has
for God’s own creation and

for its full and ecstatic participation
in the divine, trinitarian, life.’⁴

⁴ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.10



Leader's Notes

Exercise 1

Discussion Questions

- Which diagram do you relate to more?
- How would relationships work for either person?
 - If you believed your desires were fundamentally selfish and cannot be redeemed, then wouldn't you hide your desires? You would hide the self and your desires and longings. You'd be somewhat ashamed of them, at least the uglier ones.
 - How would you view other people? This really affects how we speak to people and see them. In college classes, we are sometimes taught to see literature and political statements through a lens of suspicion. We are suspicious of other people's desire for power, wealth, glory, and sex. It's the legacy of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Is vulnerability easy if you believe that a person's desires are irredeemable? Is forgiveness?
- Leader: Choose one of the example below, based on what feels most appropriate. Discuss which circle diagram explains what is going on with these examples.

Read the article by Sam Louie, "Asian Shame and Honor: A Cultural Conundrum and Case Study" (*Psychology Today*, Jun 29, 2014): <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/minority-report/201406/asian-shame-and-honor>.

James Lee, a well-dressed, articulate, 35 year old Korean-American walks into my office. Lee tells me he has no one else to turn to for help in dealing with his gambling and sexual addictions (pornography and prostitutes). I asked if he's shared this struggle with anyone close to him. Although he has a strong Korean network of friends and also belongs to a Korean-American church, he isn't comfortable sharing it with the pastors or other church members for fear of how they'd react. His wife recently discovered his sexual behaviors by finding email correspondence between James and the prostitutes and now insulates herself from him and other family functions.

In session, Lee shared the conflicting messages of growing up as the oldest child to first-generation, Korean-American parents who immigrated to the United States in the mid '70's. "As a Korean-American I grew up with messages of conditional love, shame, and the need to hide." He believes this may have contributed to his addictive behaviors today despite having a successful job in high-tech.

This is one cultural difference I see when Asian-American clients come in for counseling that's significantly different from Caucasians without an ethnic or cultural identification. Seeking help for addictions, while praised and encouraged in mainstream American society is seen as a major umbrage to the Asian individual, family, and extended Asian community.

It's no wonder that when it comes to addictions, there is scant attention given to Asians. Part of the limited attention lies in the age-old Asian custom of secrecy, silence, and shame. From an Asian addict's perspective, it's the ultimate blow of humiliation to be seen as weak since having an addiction goes against Asian social norms.

The following example comes from the Wikipedia article on 'Catholic Guilt.' It's the episode called 'The Fighting Irish' from 30 Rock. Catholic guilt is described by Jack:

Jack Donaghy: That's not how it works, Tracy. Even though there is the whole confession thing, that's no free pass, because there is a crushing guilt that comes with being a Catholic. Whether things are good or bad or you're simply... eating tacos in the park, there is always the crushing guilt [Miming the act of self-flagellation].

Tracy Jordan: I don't think I want that. I'm out. [Jack turns to leave]

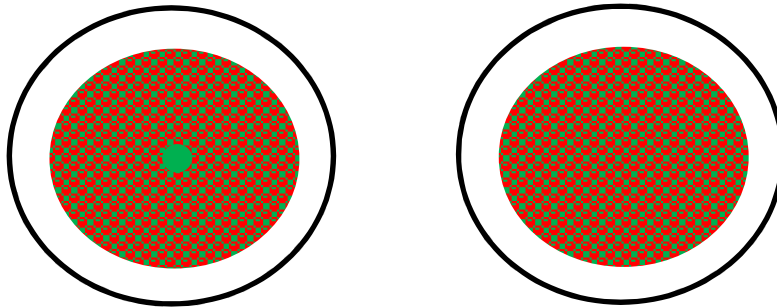
Jack Donaghy: [to himself] Somehow, I feel oddly guilty about that. [Jack crosses himself]



Exercise 2

Discussion Questions

- *How would Paul diagram himself according to Romans 7?*
 - I think Paul would draw a donut with a donut hole (left). The donut hole is a core center of goodness, which is still connected to God and desires God, because we are made in the image of God, and because He never stops reaching out to us and upholding our entire being (Colossians 1:17; Acts 17:28). But the donut is the rest of us, which seems to be a mix of good and evil, as represented by the checkered pattern.
 - But a friend of mine thinks that it's even possible to leave out the donut hole so long as we think of God loving our being as a whole (right). It may be infected, but God has in His mind the restoration of who we are.



- Hence, I don't want you to feel like our desires are only bad, or even fundamentally bad. They are fundamentally good, but crusted over, bent out of shape, and often misguided.
- Actually, this passage should clarify what is meant by the terms 'depravity' or 'sinfulness' or 'rebellion against God.' When Paul says in Romans 7:14 – 25 that as he came to understand the law (Sinai covenant) which God gave to Israel, the core part of him wanted to serve God. He distinguishes the 'I myself' from this other thing in him, which he calls 'the sin which indwells me.' By doing this, he helps us see that the image of God in every person remains intact, although tarnished and corrupted. By diagnosing himself this way, Paul brings into sharper focus and resolution a tension in the Old Testament which by itself would have been left vague.
 - On the one hand, the human heart received positively the commands of God: 'The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes' (Psalm 19:8).⁵
 - Yet, on the other hand, the human heart certainly resisted God: 'The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?' (Jeremiah 17:9).

How can these two observations be held together? How can the 'heart' rejoice in God's commands and yet be deceitful and sick? Paul's answer seems to involve developing a more precise vocabulary. He says that there is an 'I myself' which is fundamental and which is the true self. 'The sin which indwells me' is a disease and foreign power sharing Paul's internal being, and obviously influencing his choices, but not most fundamentally who he is. He wants to be delivered from this sinfulness. This seems to correspond to the language of 'circumcision of the heart,' which is the surgical language of the Pentateuch for salvation and restoration from exile by cutting something unclean away from human nature (Dt.10:16; 29:4; 30:6; cf. Jer.4:4; 17:1 – 10; 31:31 – 34). Paul also uses 'circumcision of the heart' in Romans to denote what it means to be truly Jewish (Rom.2:28 – 29); Jesus alone was able to cut sin away from human nature (Rom.6:5; 8:3) and therefore return human nature from exile, which was the goal of the Sinai covenant (Rom.10:4 quotes Dt.30:10).

⁵ Notice that God believed that Gentiles exposed to Israel would be positively impressed by the 'wisdom' in the laws He gave them: 'So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'" (Dt.4:6)



- Optional: If the person asks, 'Isn't Paul describing his *Christian* life? Not his Jewish life?'
 - This is a much bigger discussion. Suffice to say that evangelical theologians and pastors have gone both ways on this. Among the more well-known names: David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the famous British Bible expositor and preacher, was one who said that it refers to the pre-Christian life. Recently, Adrian Warnock, Preston Sprinkle, and Thomas Schreiner argued for that view as well. Dr. Sprinkle's article is very readable and substantive, addresses objections, and points out inconsistencies in holding the other view.⁶ John Piper believes that this view is exegetically possible, but holds to the view that Paul was speaking of his Christian experience.

- *Paul says in v.18, 'The willing [of the good] is present in me.' Since Paul was Jewish, he would have believed that each person was made in the image of God, according to Genesis 1:26 – 28. What are the good and godly desires that he probably felt were in him?*
 - Goodness: Ultimately, God is the source of goodness and the model for all other forms of goodness. Examples of goodness include: acts of love and service; relationship building; transparency; etc.
 - Truth: God is the ultimate truth and the model for all truth. He makes promises to act by His word and then He fulfills those promises. It began with, 'Let there be light,' and then there was light. Then those promises involved a longer time lapse because they invited people and their response of faith and hope. Ultimately, God truly reveals Himself in Jesus and by the Spirit.
 - Significance: God made us to have meaning and significance, that everything we did would have meaning.
 - Justice: God is a God of restorative justice. The way He works to restore people in sin shows that. The way He modeled the Jewish law as involving the victim to name a compensation price (Ex.21:22, 30), within the maximum limit of proportionality which was 'an eye for an eye.'
 - Intimacy: God's oneness of Father and Son in the Spirit is intimacy. He made us to be intimate with Himself and in communion with others.
 - Beauty: God made us to desire beauty, to be drawn to it, because He is the ultimate source of beauty. In fact, sometimes we look at a beautiful sunrise and long to throw ourselves into it. I've looked at the ocean from a cliff and wanted to throw myself off the cliff as if I could become one with the beauty in front of me. We want to share in what is beautiful because we want to share in God.
 - Friendship: God's relation of Father and Son in the Spirit is the ultimate friendship. He made us to want friendship like that. Family, too.
 - Attention and Appreciation if directed at God. We want love. That desire for love comes from God. Because God is love. Within Himself, He is a relationship of love between the Father and Son in the Spirit. So God is also the source of all love, and even participates in all genuine love.
 - Health: God is the source of life, and our bodies and minds want to be connected to Him. So we want health. Ultimately, that may be why we want resurrection life, as an expression of health. We want Jesus to heal every last wound in our bodies and minds and hearts. We can't make our health in this life the highest priority because that would be self-indulgent impatience, but we can acknowledge that we do want Jesus' definition of health embodied in his resurrection because we want God's life packaged in human form.
 - Wisdom: God's wisdom in Proverbs 8 is how He made all things including us. God's commands also come from His wisdom, and that's why there's this fit. What God commands us fits who we are. Yes, there is the sinfulness in us that resists. But when I wished for wisdom when I got married or when my first child was born, I wished ultimately for God.
 - Honoring Others: The Father loves to honor the Son in the Spirit, and the Son loves to honor the Father in the Spirit. God loves to honor us by involving us in what He's doing and saying, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' I wish I were better at giving words of affirmation and quality time in terms of love languages. We have a desire to honor others. It comes from God.
 - *What if human goodness is really God's goodness as He keeps sharing it with us?*

⁶ Preston Sprinkle, 'A Response to John Piper on Romans 7' (*Patheos*, October 7, 2014); <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/theologyintheraw/2014/10/a-response-to-john-piper-on-romans-7/>; last accessed January 8, 2016. See also Thomas Schreiner, 'Romans 7 Does Not Describe Your Christian Experience' (The Gospel Coalition, Jan 13, 2016); <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/romans-7-does-not-describe-your-christian-experience>; last accessed January 21, 2016



- Then we can't 'take credit for it' or boast in it ourselves. We don't originate the goodness. We only participate in it.
 - Then our own goodness is a witness to us of God's active goodness to us. You want goodness to triumph over evil in the world. You want love to heal the brokenness. You want justice to triumph over injustice. That is a signpost of God's activity. God is not absent or passive. But God always works with human partnership. So He is stirring up His image in us, and calling us to restore the image in ourselves by giving ourselves to the one who has fully restored the image of God in himself: Jesus. He is the medicine for human nature because he has restored human nature in himself. That's what Paul describes in Romans 8.
 - Then our goodness is an invitation from God to know Him better, and grow in more goodness with Him.
- *Paul also speaks of 'sin' as a corruption, a foreign element in his being, an alien thing that somehow infected him.*
 - *Which of those desires (above) are misdirected expressions of deeper desires that have a good root? Why?*
 - Money: the good root is probably significance, but a pure desire for money is rooted in a mixture of fear and greed. So money is desired as a form of protection from other people, or uncertainty, or something.
 - Aggression: the good root is probably significance, but this violates others and turns them into objects
 - Fame: as above; we want others to be our admirers and in a sense worship us as a god.
 - Pornography: the good root is probably intimacy, but this violates God's vision for sex and marriage, damages the self, and involves harm to others
 - Attention and Appreciation if it is directed only at other people, rather than God, and leads us to neglect what Jesus actually taught
 - Being Better Than Others: while a desire to be better than one's own previous self can be good, this takes the focus away from God's appropriate vision for growth, and places it on being better than others.
 - Power Over Others: the good root is probably significance, but this twisted desire is based on fear and greed
 - Power to Deceive: as above, but we are willing to distort truth in order to get power
 - Hallucinogenic Drugs: the good root might be a desire for beauty or intimacy or even health (avoidance of pain), but this desire is based on illusion and harms the self. It creates a false reality only in one's mind that cannot actually be shared with others and avoids God.
 - *Why do you think jealousy (covetousness) is the main evil desire that he experienced?*
 - Maybe because when you seek goodness, you have to discipline yourself. But you can still be jealous of people who have more 'freedom' to do evil, or jealous of those who show more goodness and get praised for it, and so on. In which case, you want praise for being good more than being good itself: you have exchanged substance for appearances, and primary things for secondary things. So sometimes we need to repent of 'our goodness' because our real goodness comes from God. It's not from ourselves. We just participate in God's goodness.
 - Maybe because while it's challenging to control your outward behavior, it's a lot harder to control your desires, emotions, thoughts, resentments, jealousies, and so on. You might want things outside of God's will for you because you want to exact retribution on God for drawing boundaries. You might even want to harm yourself in order to cause God pain.
 - Maybe because Paul sees his own experience as related to the fall of Adam and Eve. They were jealous of God and wanted to be their own gods. They wanted to define good and evil from within their own selves. Paul may have felt the same way. He lived by rules. But he may have wondered, 'Why can't I make up the rules myself???'



- *Practical examples of people coming to Jesus*
 - I think people came to Jesus through the ‘happy ending story’ teaching because there is something in us that hopes for a happy ending. A happy ending is where a hero triumphs over a villain, or good triumphs over evil. We see that play out and we want to be on the side of the hero, even if there’s a part of us that is on the side of the villain. Jesus is the hero who is able to heal us, who are partly heroes and partly villains. And we hope for good to triumph over evil because we are made in the image of God, according to Genesis 1. And because God is good, we long for goodness.
 - I think people came to Jesus on service trips because they were reflecting on serving others. They were reflecting on the history of racial injustice, and bothered by it. And they were asking questions about life’s meaning and significance. They also saw Christians doing service and asking how they could follow Jesus more faithfully. And because we are made in the image of God, and God is relational and about justice and goodness, we are also made to be relational and to be about justice and goodness.

- *Practical example of the temptation towards pornography, and the desires underneath it.*
 - This might be a new way of looking at yourself, or your struggles. It feels a little bit like judo, doesn’t it? Working with your desires as opposed to just trying to squelch them or suppress them.
 - A friend of mine once said that the minister of his church told the youth, ‘Just don’t think about sex! If you do, you’re sinning!’ Another recalled that it took a bigger toll on the girls, who felt doubly bad: thinking lustful thoughts, and triggering lustful thoughts.
 - Illus: Saint Patrick of Ireland in his *Confessions* records an episode when he baptized a very beautiful woman. He said, ‘I baptized a very beautiful woman today. Praise God!’ Do you see how that’s really a different approach? And hopefully a healthier approach? Because we want to be in touch with the desire behind the desire. And that desire leads us to a loving God.

- *When you feel like Scripture, or someone, challenges you to ‘hold back’ a sinful desire in yourself, does that feel like suppressing you as a person? How else might you interpret that challenge?*
 - You can interpret it as reorganizing your desires. Or challenging some desires to explore what we think are deeper, truer, and more fundamental desires beneath.
 - You can distinguish between your desires and your personhood. Like in sports, your desire to be lazy or give up probably shouldn’t be equated to your personhood. You have other desires to grow and develop. The spiritual life is similar.

- *Compare what Paul says to what Batman says: ‘But it’s not who I am underneath, it’s what I do that defines me.’ (Batman Begins, 2005)*
 - Batman says that his actions define him. Paul says that his actions don’t define him because there are two sources for his actions.
 - Batman works from the outside in. Paul works from the inside out.
 - Batman says disregards who he is underneath. Paul believes who he is underneath, at the deepest level, is his true self.

- Optional: So you’re saying that the human being is intrinsically good?
 - In a relational sense, yes, because God is always chasing after us and sharing His goodness with us, and even *by sharing His goodness with us*. That’s what it means for God to have made us in His image (Gen.1:26 – 28) and to be upholding our very being in himself (Col.1:17; Acts 17:28). So it’s not in an ‘individualistic’ sense, as if we are just good ‘on our own’ and God ‘owes’ us favor as a result of some contract He’s bound to uphold. There is no such thing as ‘on our own.’ And God shares His goodness with us and shows us favor because that is who He is.
 - Don’t we break God’s laws? Well yes and no. What laws did Paul acknowledge breaking in Romans 7? Covetousness, the tenth commandment. What about the first through ninth commandments? He seems to think he did okay on those. Paul demonstrates by his own pre-Christian autobiography that a person living before Jesus and without faith in Jesus is ‘enslaved’ to covetousness (the 10th commandment), but not all the other sins (breaking Sabbath, murder, adultery, bearing false witness, theft, etc.). As a Jewish non-Christian, Paul had had some degree



of free will. He also demonstrates that he recognized his need for an internal deliverer to deliver him 'from this body of death' (7:24 – 25).

- Very significantly, Paul does not say that he is 'enslaved' to *unbelief* per se. Being enslaved to sin in the sense of Romans 7:14 – 25 means reproducing in ourselves covetousness – the primal sin committed by Adam and Eve. But it does not mean being enslaved to unbelief.
- Thus, I do not think Paul's self-description supports the theory of 'total depravity,' which states that human beings are intrinsically evil and 100% resistant to God.⁷ The phrase 'dead in sin' from Ephesians 2:1 tends to be interpreted by 'total depravity' supporters to mean 'total inability to choose God.' But, Paul's more precise description of his pre-Christian experience leads me to think that 'dead in sin' means being subjected to the indwelling sin which makes him say, 'Who will deliver me from the body of this death?' Paul as a Jew understood he was exiled and removed from the tree of life so that he and all other human beings could not eat from the tree of life and immortalize our own sin (Gen.3:22 – 24). Thus, being 'dead in sin' in Ephesians 2:1 is treated with more detail in Romans 7:8 – 25. It does not mean total inability to have faith or choose Christ. It means being a dying being, in exile from the garden and the immortality God intended for us.

Exercise 3

Discussion Questions

- *Is there anything that surprises you about the four quotations from Christian theologians?*
 - They affirm human original goodness, and ongoing goodness. God implanted virtue into the soul. This seems to be another way of saying, as Paul did in Romans 7, that the 'I myself' wants to serve God.
 - They affirm a relational self. Irenaeus says that since we are made in the image of God, we are dependent on God, specifically on the Holy Spirit. John Cassian quotes Philippians 2:13 in saying that God is at work in us to will and to do. John of Damascus says God is the source of all goodness and we are receivers of God's goodness. Sarah Coakley says that human desire for sexual intimacy and union with another is a derived reflection of desire in God. In each case, we are relationally dependent on God for goodness. We are not meant to be individualistic. So these quotations are not 'Pelagian' or 'Semi-Pelagian' theologically. God's grace comes first by virtue of creation, precedes our response and makes our response possible.
 - They affirm human development. We are called by God *to grow*. Irenaeus said we are called to ascend to God the perfect and uncreated. John Cassian said we are called to attain to an increase of perfection. John of Damascus says we are called to grow in virtue. Sarah Coakley says we are called into full and ecstatic participation in the divine, trinitarian, life.
 - They affirm human free will. In fact, they believed that since we are made in the image of God, we must be free to love God in return, because God is not constrained by a force outside Himself, therefore we must not be constrained by a force outside ourselves. BUT, they defined freedom ultimately with reference to God's intention for relationship. So true 'freedom' must be defined as freedom to be who God intended. Irenaeus says, 'God has always preserved free will and self-government in man' (*Against Heresies* 4.15.2), not in the sense that people can and might sin against God in eternity, but so that we might freely choose to always choose God forever. That's what Irenaeus says here: 'Inasmuch, then, as the Spirit of God pointed out by the prophets things to come, forming and adapting us beforehand for the purpose of our being made subject to God...' (*Against Heresies* 4.20.8). Freedom is being free from everything that hinders us from being subject to God. Christian freedom is not defined as freedom from God. That's an Enlightenment idea which started from the idea of the autonomous individual.
 - Augustine of Hippo is often said to be the first theologian to deny free will. Orthodox author, monk, and scholar Seraphim Rose argues that Augustine did *not* actually deny the free will of every person, but Augustine's writings show that he was not always consistent to defend it as the

⁷ Wikipedia, 'Total depravity' (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_depravity) last accessed January 7, 2016



result of God's grace towards all.⁸ Augustine affirmed free will in his early book *The Freedom of the Will*. But in his later writings, especially while debating Pelagius, he so emphasized God's activity that he did not give proper place to the human will. Martin Luther and John Calvin selectively followed the later writings of Augustine out of all the earlier theologians.⁹

- *What passages of Scripture are they referring to? Why do those passages seem to be important?*
 - Genesis 1:26 – 28 speaks of God making humanity, male and female, in His image. In its original context, Genesis appears to be an argument with various other creation myths in the region. In the Greek story of Pandora's box, Zeus made women to punish men for receiving fire from the titan Prometheus. That's not a flattering view of women. Most other creation myths made humans out to be the slaves of the gods, meant to make food for them. The gods would send war, or flood, or disease upon humanity when overpopulation happened.¹⁰ But in Genesis, both male and female were made in God's image.
 - *Where is Irenaeus getting the view that Adam and Eve were made to 'ascend' to God?* In Genesis 2, God implicitly invited them to eat from the Tree of Life, and not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The trees represented God, and the fruit of the trees represented God offering Himself in two modes: He offered His life as something to take, and He offered His authority to define good and evil as something not to take. Regarding the second tree, humanity was to let the power to define good and evil rest with God, and not take it into themselves. By doing this, they would grow in trust of God, and understanding of reality. But they *were* to eventually eat from the Tree of Life because it would make them immortal, which is clear from Genesis 3:22 – 24. That is, they would share in the eternal life of God, which is life on a deeper level. In an unfallen state, it seems to me like God was offering them the choice to freely choose to always choose Him forever.¹¹
 - Philippians 2:13 is from Paul. Paul says that God is at work in you to will (desire) and to do His good work. In that passage, Paul is referring to Christians. So it's not clear by itself whether Paul would say that about non-Christians. That's why it was important for us to consider Paul's pre-Christian Jewish experience in Romans 7. Paul also says that God works through the conscience in Gentile people who are not under the Jewish law (Romans 2:12 – 16).
 - *When Paul uses the word 'salvation' in Philippians (and elsewhere), what does he mean? What are we saved from?*
 - In the context of Philippians 2, we are saved from *our own sinfulness*, from the corruption within our human nature. Just like in Romans 7. This is how C.S. Lewis understood it, for instance. Paul is saying that our salvation from pride and arrogance is found in Christ Jesus, and in having the mind of Christ in us (Phil.2:5 – 11).
 - Paul is *not* saying, at least in Philippians 2 and Romans 5 – 8, that we are saved from *the punitive-retributive justice of God*. Notice Romans 5:10, 'We will be saved from the wrath of God [previously defined in Romans as our turning away from God based on Romans 1:24, 26, 28] by *his life* [and not merely his death per se, although that is encompassed in the way Paul thinks of Jesus' life].' That is, we will be saved from *the separation from God which we have caused ourselves*, through Jesus who united his divine nature with our human nature *in his life*. Although, unfortunately, that is how many Protestants tend to understand the word 'salvation.'

⁸ Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2007 third edition), p.36 for Augustine's affirmations and p.37 – 42 for denials, including how this debate played out between Augustine's disciple Prosper of Aquitaine and John Cassian. Rose, chapters 3 – 5 are very helpful for historical perspective on how these debates played out and were settled. For more information, see Appendix A: Augustine on the Human Will.

⁹ Martin Luther, "Disputation against Scholastic Theology"; cf. Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*; John Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, chapter 2, section 4

¹⁰ Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), p.36 – 53; Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (2nd publishing Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publishing, 2000), p.105 – 109; Tikva Frymer-Kensky. "The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for Understanding Genesis 1 – 9," *Biblical Archaeologist* 40 (1977):152. See also B.S. Yegerlehner, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* (Diss., Boston University, 1975) and David Daube's *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982). To see my notes and sermon on the significance of this comparison, see <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-does-bible-have-evidence-of-gods-design.pdf>.

¹¹ For more information on Genesis 2 and 3, including important early Christian commentaries on this section by Irenaeus of Lyons and Methodius of Olympus, please see my notes here: <http://nagasawafamily.org/genesis.02.08-17.sg.pdf>



- Paul's two letters to Timothy show that we have a responsibility to stir up and develop the grace of God in us. Notice that sometimes the word 'grace' is translated 'gift,' but it is the same Greek word *charis*.
- *What does John of Damascus of mean when he says that we withdraw from God?* 'Wickedness is a withdrawal of goodness' by our free choice. God doesn't withdraw from us. We withdraw from God. (If this raises questions about the topic of hell, hold off for now. It is a later chapter, and you can cover it later.)
- *Why does Sarah Coakley refer to Sigmund Freud? Is that important for us?*
 - Yes, very important. Freud taught that our most basic desires are sex and aggression. He was deeply influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche; Nietzsche said that we have a desire for power. Karl Marx was another who believed that our most basic desires were for possession and power.
 - Because they see human desires as fundamentally negative and untrustworthy. In their view, human desires cannot possibly lead us to God. Because for them, God does not exist. But also because for them, human desires are merely urges towards power and resentment, sex and aggression.
 - Remember what we talked about in Exercises 2 and 3, when we studied Romans 7. What would you do if your core self and desires were irredeemably self-centered? What would you do if you believed that about everyone else? It would lead to hiding, distrust, and suspicion.
 - Notice that Sarah Coakley sounds like Irenaeus! She says that we are meant to participate in the trinitarian life. Irenaeus said that, too, by offering a theory for which person of the Trinity does what as we 'ascend' into the life of God.
 - The Western world now celebrates motivations and desires of aggression, possession, sex, power, greed, and self-centeredness. Even while it complains and laments that very fact.
 - Bolivia in its Constitution has given rights to the land and nature. They refer to 'the good life' (*buen vivir*), where 'good' refers to morally good, not hedonistically fun.