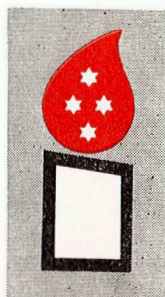


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THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN AUSTRALIA DIOCESE OF SYDNEY



STUDY No.

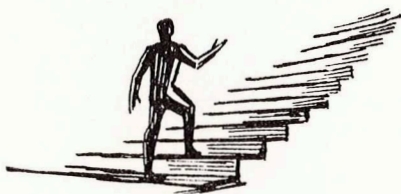
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WHAT IS WRONG WITH MAN AND HIS WORLD?

In our modern age with all its material and technological progress, with its new and fascinating scientific discoveries, perhaps we would be inclined to think that man as a person, as a moral being, is slowly but surely improving. This is certainly a very attractive idea but does it line up with what the Bible teaches? Does it in fact line up with our experience?



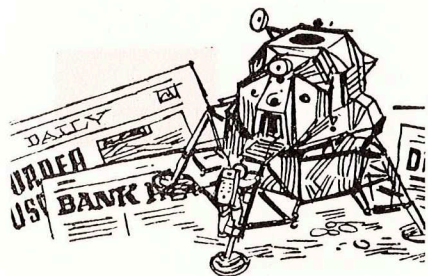
What is our experience?

The definite statements about the nature of man in the Bible run along the same line: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God",¹ "There is none righteous, no, not one",² All the world is "guilty before God".³ It might be hard to agree with this, except that every

front page of the daily newspaper and every TV news bulletin confirm it. Murder, rape, arson, riots. . . . Is this man "come of age"? It was thought that maybe the next generation, the post-war "wonder generation" that has grown up since rationing and restrictions, and since science started solving all our problems, will show a new character? Not all would agree; for example, Malcolm Muggeridge claims otherwise: University students, he says, "are supposed to be the spearhead of progress, flattered and paid for by their admiring seniors, an elite who will happily and audaciously carry the torch of progress into the glorious future opening before them. . . . Yet how infinitely sad; how, in a macabre sort of way, funny, that the form their insubordination takes should be a demand for Pot and Pills, for the most tenth-rate sort of escapism and self-indulgence ever known! . . . All is prepared for a marvellous release of youthful creativity; we await the great works of art, the high-spirited venturing into new fields of perception and understanding — and what do we get? The resort of any old slobbering

debauchee in the world at any time — 'Dope and Bed'."

It always has been the case, and it always will be. The nature of man, despite the high aspirations of science, has never changed. Man can get to the moon, but he cannot



change himself. In fact, newspaper headlines would indicate that he is getting worse. We had to invent the science of psychiatry to cope with the countless patients who could not cope with the scientific world we had created. We find ourselves at enmity with others. We often feel cut off and separated from our friends, even members of our own families. At times we are conscious of a desperate loneliness and yet we don't know how to fill the void. What is more, to make it intensely personal, when we take a long, hard look at our own lives, what do we see? Progress? Moral improvement? Idealistic behaviour? Loving concern for others in need? Sadly no! Instead we find, to our horror, the same symptoms of rebellion against authority, the same personal envy and greed, the same deep resentments that bring other people into the headlines, but, mercifully, keep us out. Our sins may be minor on the public stage, but in our own heart we know they are major transgressions, basic weaknesses, barely controllable urges.

How did this situation come about?

The Bible's answer to this question agrees with all we notice about man around us. The Bible says that we were created "in the image of God"⁴ — we had a *natural likeness* to God in that we had self-consciousness and freedom of choice, a conscience and a personality; and we had a *moral likeness* to God, in that our moral powers were given a right direction — man was made with a love for God and concern for others. But in the tragic story recounted in Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve in the Garden failed their big test: they disobeyed God. Theirs was a spirit of rebellion and independence — they wanted to "become like gods". As a result, man was thrown out of the garden and would have to toil in the world for his survival. He was cut off from God, and each generation since has handed down to the next generation this same bias towards rebellion and independence. The whole of mankind was involved in Adam's sin. This is sometimes called "Original Sin", and the Church of England in its 39 Articles of Religion (a basic summary of Christian doctrine drawn up 400 years ago) declares that it believes Original Sin to be a teaching firmly taught in the Bible, and clearly evident in the history of man.

There are several ways to describe this bias away from God. The Bible calls it "sin", "transgression", "falling short of God's glory", "missing the mark". It teaches that sin is a *universal* characteristic: there never will be a generation who through superior breeding or socialist ideology become perfect, or attain moral maturity. Only one man managed to achieve perfect relationships with other men and walk in tune with God, and He was Jesus,

God-made-flesh, the carpenter born around 4 B.C. and died about A.D. 30 who became "the man for others" and the Saviour of the world.

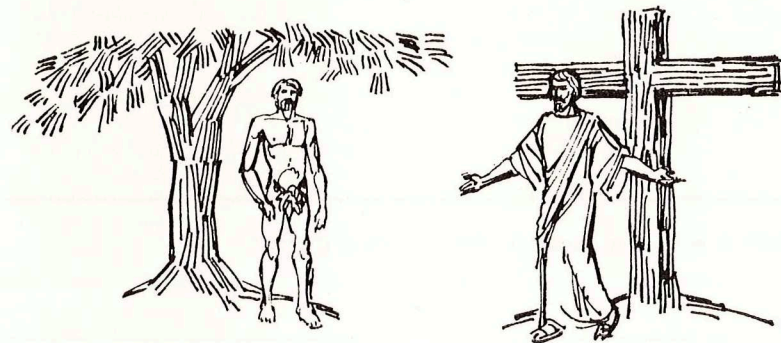
The consequences of this sinful nature are serious

Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick." And in many other places in the Bible man's nature is described as "depraved". This does not mean that every man or woman commits grave immorality or murder, but that the average man's will is perverted, his understanding is darkened, his conscience defiled, and his affections debased. Often the only thing that keeps the average man from serious crime is fear of what people would say, or fear of losing job or friends.

The consequences in family and community relationships are obvious: though a young man and woman may be madly in love when they get married, it is tragically possible for each to become selfish, to drift apart, to start antagonizing one another, and for the marriage to break up. Though both may realize it is in their own and their children's interests to patch things up, they find themselves unable to. They cannot conquer the worst

side of their nature. Or take the employer who is always tough, always rude, always indifferent to the needs and feelings of his employees. Why is he like this? The factory or the office would get more work done more happily if he was not so moody or so unreasonable. But he cannot help himself, and in fact he does not even want to.

The results of Adam's disobedience have an even wider effect. Romans chapter 8 teaches that the whole creation was somehow involved in the consequences of the sin in the Garden, and therefore became subject to corruption. So just as man inherited the process of age and death, so the rest of creation became subject to the unchanging law of decay and corruption. Flowers bloom, then die. Harvests are ripe, then are destroyed by fire or flood. Animals devour one another to survive. Man fights his environment all the time to try to subdue it and get some enjoyment out of life. It is an endless circle. But Romans 8:21 says, "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God." Just as somehow Adam involved the whole universe in his rebellion, so somehow Christ redeemed the universe by His life of obedience and His death on the Cross. So now the whole world waits



for the final redemption when death and decay will be annihilated and peace and life will reign on earth once more.

For behind all this fight against decay and death stands Christ. And at the head of the opposition stands Satan, pictured in the Bible as a personal force of evil, bringing strong temptations and pressures to bear on all men, and especially on any who claim to be Christians.

God's Law makes it worse

You may say the Bible makes it worse, because it points out all the time how far short we fall of God's standards. But this is not the end of the story, for the purpose of God's law is "to bring us to Christ".⁵ It shows up our weakness, in order that we might see how

perfectly Christ has made provision for our weakness. When our conscience makes us feel guilty about something, that is God saying to us that we need forgiveness, and the only way we can get it is to place our trust in Christ. We know that we cannot do anything to please God before we become Christians,⁶ so our only hope is to rely on God's forgiveness of us. And this is available through the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We can be regarded as righteous by God when we believe in Christ, and by no other way. But we shall look at this in more detail in later studies.

Bible references:

- 1 Romans 3:23
- 2 Romans 3:10
- 3 Romans 3:19
- 4 Genesis 1:26-27
- 5 Galatians 3:24
- 6 See Romans 8:3

STUDY 4 is on the question "Who is Jesus Christ?"

Think about this question: If Jesus was not who He claimed to be, was He a fool or a fraud?