

Humanity: Constitutional Nature, III; Sin

We really need to get off the doctrine of humanity and on to the doctrine of sin—passages problematic for trichotomy. On the break I told a true story to a couple of students of an elder in a church, a friend of mine, who retired from being a chemist and became a full-time pastor in his local church. He has a great library, he studies hard and long; the old dichotomy/trichotomy thing got under his skin and he said, “I am just going to shut myself up in my study. I am going to work at it for hours. I am going to study every reference to soul and spirit in both testaments and form some conclusions.” He got about halfway done and he ended up throwing away his trichotomy because he said, “It just does not work.” It does not work and here are some of the reasons he drew his conclusion. In back-to-back verses in Luke 1, Mary prays, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Here soul and spirit seem to be used synonymously as capable of God-consciousness and communication with God. I thought only spirit did that. Luke was not following the directions when he wrote. A trichotomist could say, “Well the distinctions do not hold up here, but they do elsewhere.” Likewise in John 12, Jesus is said to be troubled in soul; NIV renders this heart. Later on in Chapter 13, He is troubled in spirit. I will not go into detail now, but variation is a regular feature of John’s style; he varies lots of things including word order and vocabulary. He hardly ever says anything in exactly the same way. Leon Morris studied every place John says something two, three, or four times. It is amazing and reads like an encyclopedia article. He concludes—it astounded me when I first heard it—that if John ever says something in precisely the same way, it is for emphasis. So when he varies his words, it usually does not carry meaning; it is just a vocabulary variety, although he makes distinctions sometimes. But if he ever says something exactly the same way twice or more, it is for emphasis. So there is no difference to Jesus being troubled in soul or in spirit. Both spirit and soul are used in these passages to denote the seat of affections, desires, and emotions. I thought that was the province of soul and not spirit according to the standard trichotomist definitions. Compare grief, being referred to the soul and to the spirit. It will not do to claim that the spirit survives death as in some passages but not the soul, because Revelation 6:9 speaks of the souls under the altar and Hebrews 12 speaks of just the spirits of human beings made perfect. You say, “They are not talking about different parts of us—these are two different ways of speaking about the same reality of being absent from the body and present with the Lord.” I agree. Human beings are comprehensively designated as “body and soul” and “body and spirit.” My point is that these expressions are not designating two-thirds of us. The former is found in Matthew 10:28: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul, rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Hell.” Jesus is not leaving spirit exempt from the justice of God and the judgment of God. It is totally missing His point if you say He’s going to judge part of us but not all of us. No, He is comprehensively designating human beings. The meaning is human beings can get at your body, but even death does not escape from God. He has access to both material and immaterial parts. We cannot get away from Him. In a similar way in II Corinthians 7:1, spirit and flesh seem to comprehensively describe human nature. “Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” Is He leaving part of us out? No, it would be foolish to say, “Well, He is not talking about the soul dimension of human nature here.” No, He is talking about the whole of human nature.

Dying is described variously as a departure of the soul and sometimes as a departure of the spirit. And as we said previously, the dead are sometimes referred to as souls and sometimes as spirits. In conclusion, with dichotomy I would acknowledge the existence of our material and immaterial parts. We are obviously two parts. However, I would emphasize our unity as most important. The union of body and soul is normal. Scripture does teach the existence of an intermediate state in which our immaterial part lives an incorporeal, which means “without the body,” existence. However, this state is temporary and incomplete. Our final state will be eternal life as unified persons with glorified bodies on a new earth

underneath a new heaven. The best book on this is John Cooper's *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*. Likewise, the best terminology seems to be his holistic dualism. So I affirm dichotomy with a more contemporary emphasis on the oneness, the normal oneness, of human beings. For the sake of completeness, I have a little excursus on the origin of the soul. This issue is a kind of historical curiosity now. I cannot take a position concerning traducianism or creationism; I think the Bible does not give us enough data to make a conclusion, so I would affirm that we have souls. I do not know exactly how they are passed on from one generation to another; I just leave that with the Lord and believe that we have them. He does not seem to tell us how that works exactly. (Traducianism and creationism are the belief that souls are procreated with the body and the belief that God creates and imparts individual souls at conception, respectively.)

Let us move on to the doctrine of sin. I will give a biblical description and overview of sin, the Fall, and original sin. This is a greatly neglected area. Even evangelical pastors hardly ever talk about original sin. The emphasis is on actual sin and, while it is not bad to emphasize the actual sins we commit, the Bible does speak more ultimately of how we got into this predicament in the first place. We will study the effects of the Fall because it is important for us to try to understand as best we can what unsaved people are able to do or not able to do to rescue themselves from their plight.

Let us begin with a biblical description of sin. Let me go backward and mention four points: sin is tricky, it is deceitful, it involves thoughts, words and deeds, and it includes both guilt and pollution. First of all, sin is an offense against the character of God. And a subset of that is this: sin is a violation of God's holy law. We see this exemplified in Psalm 51. There is some debate among Old Testament scholars as to the genuineness of the psalm titles. I say that because, if this title is genuine, it helps my case because that means that Psalm 51 speaks of the confession of David after the sins of his life, namely, adultery and murder. But even if it is not David—I am not saying the Psalm titles are not genuine, but I am not resting everything on that—verse 14 says, “Save me from blood guilt, oh God.” It does seem to be the confession of a murderer. My point is this: the Psalmist is confessing sins committed toward other human beings. That becomes very important when we read his words in verse 4. Let me start with Psalm 51:1: “Have mercy on me, oh God, according to Your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight.” How can he say that? Against You, You only.” The rest of verse 4 is also confusing, “[...] so that you are proved right when you speak.” It is understood as something like this: Lord, I am now confessing my sins so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when You judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. How could he possibly say in verse 4, considering the fact that he has committed tremendous sins toward other human beings, “Against You, You only, have I sinned”? Does it mean that human beings do not matter? Of course it does not. Does it mean we have no obligation to confess our sins to one another and ask forgiveness when we wrong other persons? Of course it does not mean that. But it means the Psalmist understands a profound truth. Ultimately, most importantly, all sin is sin against God Himself. Friends, if we had the time to put up on the overhead a list of those things that keep us from sinning, we could do an impressive job and, in the end, I would say the Bible uses many good motivations to keep us from sinning. If we really were honest, we could come up with quite a list. We do not drive at 110 miles an hour because of fear of civil penalties like losing our driver's license, wasting money on a fine, hurting other persons, and hurting ourselves. Those are all good motivations for not speeding. We do not do some outlandish things that sometimes cross our minds because of shame, peer pressure, and not wanting to face family and friends in church. I say, “Praise the Lord for all of that.” Some of us have taken vows for positions of office in the church. We do not want to go back on those things we have confessed in the sight of God and other people; it would be a great personal shame and it

would bring shame on that office. All that is good, and likewise so are a hundred other reasons you could think of for not sinning, but it amazes me how unspiritual we are, how, despite talk about being God-centered, how man-centered we really are. Be honest. How much does the fact that sin hurts God deter you from sin in a personal, everyday way in your actual life? How much does the fact that sin hurts God keep you from sinning? I think we are spiritual pigmies. We think we are more spiritual than we are. It probably plays a little part in our lives. Again I will say it, “Thank God for the lesser motivations.” Any good thing that keeps us from sin, “Hallelujah.” But have we forgotten that the most important person in the world is God Himself and that sin grieves the Holy Spirit and is an attack on the character of God? We do need to be more God-centered and it would make us more spiritual, so that if nobody sees what we do or what we think and oftentimes nobody else does, God sees, God knows. That, in itself, is sufficient motivation to please our Father, to say thank you for His grace, to love Him who first loved us. So that is why I put first sin is an offense against God. You may wonder why I put it in the same sentence with ‘in violation of His law?’ What is it about the law of God that makes transgression of the law an attack upon God? What is it about the law that makes that the case?” God’s law is just and righteous, to be sure. Why is it so? How do these things fit together? God’s law is a manifestation, reflection, and revelation of His character. That is why. What is the result when the law hits us? It convicts us. It convinces us. Does the law convict us because it is a revelation of the complete character of God? No, but it certainly is a revelation of the holiness and justice of God. God is good to give us His law to show us our need of Him. First John 3:4 can say all sin is lawlessness and that is why the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sin as “Any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.” That is a good biblical definition of sin. I cannot look up every reference because of time.

The second point is that sin includes both guilt and corruption in the historical word. I like to use a modern synonym, “pollution”; we know what pollution means. They meant by corruption what we mean by pollution. Sin includes both guilt and corruption. I want to come back to these in a bit, but for now, I want to think about the biblical anecdotes to these things.

How does God remedy our guilt and pollution? First let us define the two. Guilt is our being liable to the wrath of God, our coming under God’s condemnation. Pollution is the actual sinfulness of our lives. Guilt is a legal category that has to do with our being condemnable before God, the judge. Pollution is a moral category that says we are actually corrupted in our being and lives by sin. We are guilty, we are condemned, and we are dirty; we are polluted, our lives are tarnished. Ephesians 2:3 is a good place to show the guilt of sin. I oppose the modern approach to be positive in ministry and to not talk about the great historical doctrine of sin. We are told that it is too negative. Martin Luther had it exactly right in saying, “We delight to talk about the Gospel, the good news, but we talk about the law and the bad news in order to make the good news comprehensible.” We are trying to bind up people’s wounds without even showing them that they are wounded. The emphasis of Norman Vincent Peal and Robert Schuller and others is, in the end, harmful and, at least in their public ministries, a confusion of the Gospel because the good news is not even understandable if it is taken out of the biblical context of the bad news. Ephesians 2:3 says, “All of us”—after saying, “we were dead in transgressions”—“lived among the disobedient at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.” Like the rest we were by nature objects of wrath, literally children of wrath. “By nature” means by birth. Compare Paul’s use of the same expression in Galatians 2 where, in distinguishing Jews from Gentiles, he says, “We who are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners,” which the NIV renders as, “We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners.” Like the rest we were by nature children of wrath. It is a Jewish idiom carried over into the New Testament where a son of something means deserving something. In 2 Samuel 12, a son of death means a human being who deserves to die. Here “sons of wrath” and “children of wrath” are expressions that mean “worthy to receive wrath,” hence the NIV’s way of communicating it is good in the end. Like the rest we were by nature or birth objects of wrath.

Friends, we deserve the wrath of God and if we got what was coming to us, we all would end up in Hell forever. Praise God for His grace in sending His Son; the very next verse says, “But because of God’s great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions.” Paul did not give the bad news as an end in itself, and neither should we. He gave the bad news in this context to help Christians appreciate the grace of God. Sin involves guilt. It means deserving the wrath of the almighty God. Sin also involves pollution, the actual corruption of human nature and life. One of the saddest verses in the Bible to me is in Genesis 6 describing human kind before the flood. We read: “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” It does sound like an advertisement for our primetime television. And how about Galatians 5, which talks about the so-called deeds of the flesh? I am going to make this passage do double-duty. Guilt means we deserve condemnation and pollution means we sin—our actual lives, our speech, our thoughts, and our deeds are corrupted. What is the biblical anecdote to guilt and then to pollution or corruption? We are guilty. What does God do for us? Grace is the anecdote to both. Justification is the biblical anecdote to guilt. God does not hold our sins against us, but instead He declares us righteous. Pardon is a good way to say this. Where is the biblical anecdote to the corruption of sin, the pollution of sin? Sanctification is correct. In other words, God meets our needs. As a matter of fact, He meets our needs even more than this, but in light of our present discussion I thought that would be beneficial for you to see. Galatians 5:13 through 6:12 form a grand pattern, it seems to me. It begins and ends by speaking about love. It enjoins love on both sides. Regular parallelism of speech or writing follows the pattern where the letters refer to ideas or words A, B, A, B or A, B, C, A, B, C. Inverted parallelism or chiasm goes like this: A, B, B, A or A, B, C, C, B, A. My own thesis is that there is an inverted parallelism in Galatians 5:13 through 6:2. Let me start broad and narrow it down. First of all, in 5:13 and 14 we have an emphasis on love: “You, my brothers, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love. In fact the entire law in terms of its ethical teachings is summed up in this. Love your neighbor as yourself.” Now in 6:1 and 2 the word love is not used, but the concept is: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently, but watch yourself or you may also be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ,” which I understand to be the law of love; the concept is there on both ends. If I keep moving in, I have strife in 5:15 and 5:26. Galatians 5:15 says, “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” Likewise, there are interpersonal conflicts spoken of in 5:26: “Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” You say, “How did these people get like this? It is a long story, but the indication is that this is a way a congregation can end up if they have an improper understanding of the grace of God and an overemphasis on law. Law breeds rivalries, conceit, provocation, and envy, as seen in 5:26. Law also breeds this attacking each other, at least verbally, in 15, in actual destruction of one another. What is the antidote to this strife? The answer is the Holy Spirit. Twice Paul speaks of trusting and obeying the Holy Spirit. Here is how he says it, in 5:15: “Live by the spirit.” In 5:25 he says, “since we live by the Spirit.” In one place he says, “live by the Spirit now,” and here he says, “since we live by the Spirit,” but the meaning is somewhat different. In 5:16 it is a command: “Live by the Holy Spirit.” In 5:25, “since we live by the Spirit” means something like this: because we have been born again by the spirit, then comes the command, let us keep in step with the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit. To live by the Spirit, to walk by the Spirit, my interpretation in these two places, and there is a further mention of it in 5:18, means to go step-by-step in hand with the Spirit. It seems to implore you to believe in the Spirit—not only to trust the Spirit for the resources you need and to obey God, the Holy Spirit. At the center of the chiasm, at the center of the inverted parallelism, we have the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. Following John Sanderson in his good book, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, I am calling the deeds of the flesh weeds. I am doing that because the passage actually pursues this gardening imagery further. For example, 6:7 says, “[...] God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will

reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Let us not become weary and well-doing, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” So using the term, the “deeds of the flesh,” is another way of capturing that. They (the sinful deeds) are the weeds, if you will.

So if we use letters, love would be A, strife would be B, obey the spirit would be C, and weeds would be D. D prime (the prime indicates some difference, but substantial similarity) would be the fruit of the spirit, C prime would be obey the Spirit, B prime would be strife, and A prime would be love. “So what,” you say, “The weeds and the fruit of the Spirit are over against each other.” We need to understand the fruit here over against the deeds of the flesh. And if we summarize the deeds of the flesh, we can do so under categories. The acts of the sinful nature, he says, are obvious; the first kinds of sin mentioned are sexual sins. That sounds like Romans 1, does it not? And that is especially attractive when the second kinds of sins he mentions are sins of religious life: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery are sexual sins. Idolatry and witchcraft—how perverse for God’s great creatures to abuse their own bodies, their own sexuality, and then even worse, to abuse worship. Sin and worship make a terrible combination. The largest group of deeds of the flesh is sins of interpersonal relations. This is no accident. Remember these were people who were biting and devouring each other and so forth. Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, and orgies are sins of excess. So you have sexual sins, sins having to do with worship, sins of interpersonal relations, and sins of excess. Paul says as a matter of fact in 21, if people’s lives are characterized by these things—obviously Christians can do these things because the group he is writing to does some of them at least and he is writing to correct them—it is an indication that the people are not even saved at all. There is a contrast. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace (in this context of congregational life, this does not mean inner, heart-felt peace, as in Philippians 4, but harmony) patience, kindness, goodness (this probably means generosity—again in a corporate context) faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. I mention all of this to say that sin not only includes guilt before God, but it also involves pollution of human life and human societal life. I use Galatians 5 as my proof of that. I will be back to the same passage when I argue that sin not only includes thoughts and words, but also actions.

We certainly need the Holy Spirit to strengthen, help, and minister in our lives to enable us to live the Christian lives that God intends us to live. Sin involves both guilt and pollution; it is an attack against God and a violation of His law. Sin also includes thoughts, words and deeds. We need fresh, ongoing expositions of the Ten Commandments; they are so neglected. The Commandments are not only outward, but they are also inward: spiritual. They are a demonstration of Paul’s comments in Romans that the law is spiritual and holy and good. The tenth commandment prohibits coveting; it is hard to get more spiritual and inward than that. To desire one’s neighbor’s possessions or spouse is breaking the commandments of God. Jesus’ exposition of the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount underscores the Old Testament spiritual view and even takes it to a higher plane. To speak ill of one’s brother, to hate one’s brother, is to commit murder in the heart. The Pharisees apparently were saying as long as you did not take the other guy’s life you could be a cesspool within and hate as much as you want. As long as you did not take his life you were not guilty of murder. No, Jesus says that is wrong, that murder begins in the heart. And they likewise said, “As long as one did not commit sexual acts with another person, one could give full vent to one’s lust.” “No,” Jesus said, “you commit adultery with your eyes or if in your heart you desire someone other than your spouse sexually.” Sin includes thoughts. May God give us grace to fight our battles there and to largely win them, by His grace.

Sin involves words. James 3 might be the most extensive section in the Scriptures on speech under the metonymy—the figure of speech whereby two things are so closely associated that the one stands for the other. The tongue is used here for that which it produces: words. It says nothing good about human

speech. It says, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness." You say, "Is this not negative?" Yes, I am especially convicted in the context. Not many of you should become teachers, brothers. Why do you say that? Because teachers will be more strictly judged since they make their living talking. The proverb is true: where there is a multitude of words, transgression is unavoidable. I have never had a year of teaching in which I did not have to apologize to at least one student for some foolish thing I said, often times not meaning harm, and often times the students were gracious and did not even take offense, but where there is a multitude of words, transgression is unavoidable. It is the truth. How many times have we hurt our loved ones with words just coming out and we wish we could take them back but the harm has already been done? Sins of speech are spoken of in this passage. James 3:5-6a says, "Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body." How much does the human tongue weigh? Give me measurements of the tongue of Adolph Hitler and then measure his influence on western civilization. It is incredible. It is the demonized speeches of that man and the country he came to mesmerize that led to millions of deaths and world history changed for the worst. And this was just from one tongue. There were other factors, but that was a major one, indeed. Sin includes thoughts, words, and actions. Back to the concept of the deeds of the flesh; I am going to go to Hebrews 3 for my final point, and that is that sin is deceitful. Hebrews 3:12 says, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." I will give you shorthand from that. See to it, brothers, that none of you commits apostasy—turns away from God—but encourage one another daily as long as it is called today (that word, "today," is a quote from verse 7, which in turn is a quote from Psalm 95) as long as it is called today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Sin is almost personified here. Personification is a figure of speech in which an inanimate object is given human qualities. Here sin is spoken of as though it was a deceitful person. Watch out that none of you is hardened by sin's deceitfulness. The implication is something like this: sin is a tricky fellow and he is out to get you; he is a swindler, and if you let him have his way, after a while sinning will be easier and easier. You will become hardened by it and you will not even be bothered by your sins. What is the antidote here? It is seen in verse 13: daily encouragement. Friends, this is a great proof passage for accountability. Each of us needs a person, I recommend a fellow believer of the same sex, to hold him or her accountable before God. I do much better with some of my most key temptations when I know I am going to answer to somebody at the end of the week. It is very helpful. Encourage each other daily. (It can also be positive, of course, to know that someone is praying for you and asking you how you are doing.) As long as it is called today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. You say, "Does not this imply somebody can fall away from grace and be lost after they are saved? Verse 12 could look like that, but in the total scheme of things, I have to take "brothers" to mean a professed Christian, a member of the covenant community, because of verse 14. Apparently the writer himself understood the possibility of taking 12 and 13 as a loss of salvation, because in 14 he qualifies and says, "We have come to share in Christ." It is a past tense verb. "If we hold firmly to the end, the confidence we had at first," the meaning is we have been united to Christ if we persevere in faith. It can reverse the "if clause" and the "then clause" if we persevere to the end in faith. That is an indication that we have previously been joined to Christ. If we do not persevere the converse, that is indication we have not been joined to Christ, so he qualifies himself. In any case, my point is plain: sin is deceitful, so let us walk humbly before the Lord and daily confess our sins and regularly worship at church and be part of some kind of a small group. It is easy for us to neglect any of those things and God has given us those means of grace that we might grow in the Christian life.