Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the most popular genres of TV program or book is a courtroom drama. We see the prosecuting and defense lawyers questioning witnesses, and building their cases, before the jury retires and comes back with its verdict – guilty or not guilty. Well, this afternoon we are going to follow a courtroom drama; we are going to see how the prosecution and defense cases unfold. But we are not just spectators here for you are the person in the dock; it is you who is on trial. And the charges are very serious. If you are found guilty, the sentence is eternal condemnation in hell.

Now, the trial began yesterday. Most of it was spent with jury selection and opening arguments. But there was just enough time at the end of the day for the prosecuting lawyer to ask two questions. They are the two questions we looked at last week from Lord’s Day 2:

* The first one was: “What does the Law of God require of you?” And you, knowing your Bible, recited the words of Matthew 22:37-40. “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*” So that is the law that your case is about. And these words make it very clear that the standard is perfect obedience to this law.
* And the prosecuting lawyer picked this up with his follow up question: “Can you live up to all this perfectly?” And you, with the eyes of everyone in the courtroom fixed on you, replied, “No, I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbour.”

Well, at first, there was an audible gasp because it seemed like the case was open and shut – you had just admitted that you are a guilty law-breaker. But as everyone started to process your answer, it seemed like your words suggested a possible defense. After all, how can perfect obedience be required from someone with a natural tendency to disobey? It would be like requiring a left-handed person to always write with his or her right hand – that’s just not possible. So maybe the requirement for perfect obedience is unfair. Or better yet, because God made you, perhaps He is at fault for making you like you are? And overnight, that is the question that was debated all over Twitter and Reddit – Surely, this is God’s fault, isn’t it? Surely, this could be a good defense!

* 1. Well, a new day has dawned. The court is in session, again, and it soon becomes clear that the prosecuting lawyer has followed the overnight debate and he opens with this question: “**Did God create man so wicked and perverse**?”
     1. And boys and girls, “**perverse**” means deliberately and regularly doing what is wrong. When a parent says to their child, “Don’t touch those flowers!” and the child, while looking at their parent, touches them any way, that is perverse because the child knows that this is naughty and that it will not end well for him/her. And truth be told, all human beings are just like that child. We saw it this morning with Jonah – Go to Nineveh – But Jonah fled to Tarshish. And we too know God’s commandments about sexual immorality and Lord’s Day observance and stealing and anger and gossip and marriage, and we know that He sees all that we do and that our disobedience displeases Him and it is not good for ourselves or others, but we do it anyway!
     2. And notice here that the prosecutor has fairly acknowledged that this is **not just a problem that you have but a problem that we all have**, because his question is not just about you but about man or all human beings.
     3. Well, your answer to this question begins with ‘No.” And you explain that this is, first of all, because **God cannot do evil**.
        1. For example, positively, **Psalm 145:17** says, “*The Lord is righteous in all His ways*.” So the Lord only does what is good.
        2. And negatively, in the Book of Job, one of Job’s friends says this about God, “*Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to commit iniquity. Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice*.”
        3. So Scripture will not let us blame God for our wicked and perverse condition.
     4. And because you have sworn to tell the whole truth, you continue on to explain how we became wicked and perverse, beginning with the account of creation:
        1. So you state that Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. And this means that they were able to reason and to recognize right and wrong. Boys and girls, how did God describe creation after He had made A&E? “*Very good*.” A&E were **righteous**. And righteous means obedient law-keepers. And they were **holy**. And holy means that means pure and eager to obey God. And they had the right **knowledge**; they knew God as their Creator and Lord, and they knew His will for them, which was to obey His commandments to be fruitful and to exercise dominion and not to eat the fruit of one tree. And so they **loved** God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, purely and perfectly, and they **liveD** with God in the joy of a perfect, intimate, and close relationship.
           1. And if we can leave the drama of this court case aside for another moment, it is beautiful to try and imagine how delightful it was for Adam and Eve before sin entered the world. They were able to walk and talk with God. Their bodies and minds were free of sin’s limitations, like injury or illness or forgetfulness. There was no dysfunction or misunderstanding in their relationship as husband and wife. They understood their roles and perfectly complemented each other. They knew how to explore and master every aspect of creation in service of God, and there were not weeds or rust to or fear to frustrate their daily work. They truly were “*very good*.”
           2. And this must make us long for heaven, right? To be sure, there is much in this life that is good and beautiful. But sadly there is also much that is ugly and broken and tiring and upsetting and distorted. And as good as life in Eden was, **Adam and Eve were able to sin**; they were always one faithless choice away from becoming wicked and perverse. But in heaven, not only will there be beautiful fellowship with Jesus and each other, and total beauty and creativity and discovery and enjoyment, but we will not be able to sin; nothing will be able to bring our total joy to an end! I hope you meditate on that reality often!
  2. So, returning to our courtroom drama, you have told the court that God created Adam and Eve very good. But of course, Adam and Eve are not on trial; you are, and it has been established that you and all mankind are not very good but wicked and perverse. And the Prosecutor hasn’t missed this contrast either. So now he asks his next question: “**Then where does man’s corrupt nature come from**?”
     1. So now you move forward two chapters in the Bible to Genesis 3 and you tell the story of Eve and the Serpent. You point out that having received a command from God not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil, lest they die, Eve listened to the lies of the Serpent, took a bite of the fruit, and gave some to her husband who was there with her, and he, too, ate the fruit, and now their nature was changed and they were spiritually dead sinners. Now they were not God pleasers anymore but God haters. And this was seen in that when God came to visit them they hid from Him and did not ask for forgiveness but instead blamed others for their sin.
     2. And to prove that we are all like Adam and Eve you quote **Romans 8:7**, which describes our natural condition as *hostility* to God and **Romans 5:10**, which describes us as *enemies* of God, and **Ephesians 2:1**, which describes our condition as “*dead in trespasses and sins*.” And you also quote **Psalm 51:5**, which says, “*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me*,” to show that we don’t become spiritually dead at some point in life but we are born that way. The embryo in a mother’s womb that is a tiny human being already has a sinfully corrupt nature.
     3. Now, no one in the gallery and the jury would argue with what you have said because it is the plain teaching of Scripture, but they can all see that your answer is missing something, which is **the link between Adam and Eve’s sin and our corrupt condition**. You seem to be suggesting that the origins of our wickedness can be traced back to Adam and Eve eating the fruit. But you were not even there? You did not eat disobey God and eat the fruit? So why would you share in his guilt? Why would you inherit his sinful nature?
     4. And this is where you speak about what we read earlier in **Romans 5**. For there we read that “*sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men … the many died by the trespass of the one man* … *By the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man … the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men … through the disobedience of one man that many were made sinners*.”
        1. And you explain that this is the principal of **federal headship**. In the same way that Prime-minister Jacinda Adern represents all New Zealanders, because of her position/office, Adam represented all of humanity. If PM Adern were to sign a declaration of war against Greenland, every NZer would be at war with Greenland. We don’t have to be at the signing ceremony and we don’t each have to sign the paper and we may not even agree with the idea of going to war with Greenland, but we are at war with Greenland because our Prime-minister is our federal representative. And in the same way, because Adam was our federal head, when he failed to rebuke the serpent and silence Eve, you shared in his guilt. When he took the fruit from Eve and bit into it, you shared in his guilt. And so, as Adam became wicked and perverse; spiritually dead; an enemy of God, it meant that you would begin life wicked and perverse; spiritually dead; an enemy of God.
        2. And this is why the origin of your temper sins, your lust sins, your anxiety sins, your impatience sins, your laziness sins, your lack of love sins, your selfishness sins, your greed sins, and all the rest of your sins is Adam’s decision to eat the fruit. It is from him that you inherited a wicked and perverse nature.
  3. Now, the prosecutor would normally end his case by summing it all up. But before he gets a chance to do that, you quote one more Scripture – **Psalm 51:3-4**: “*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, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge*.” And having heard you say that, the prosecutor throws his hands up and says, “I rest my case! You heard it! That this person is guilty and deserving of eternal condemnation is beyond question!”
  4. So now the Judge looks over to your defense lawyer and invites him to begin the case for the defense. And it has to be said that everyone in the courtroom wonders if he will even get up as the case seems very clear and undefendable. But he does get up and he slowly makes his way to the dock and he looks at you and he says, You have rightly explained that we all inherit a corrupt nature from Adam. But isn’t it also true that we can be converted; that we can receive a new, living nature that is able to love God and neighbour? That just as we are linked with Adam, we can also be linked to a Saviour? Is this also true?
     1. And you answer, Yes, it is true. And you tell the court about Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, as recorded in **John 3**, when Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”*And you explain that we are born again when the Holy Spirit enters a person and gives them new life and light such that they understand their sin and guilt, and believe that through Christ their sins are forgiven. And from that moment on, they become federally linked to Jesus! And they are now able to choose to obey God’s law and they want to please God with their obedience.
     2. And to prove this you quote **2 Corinthians 5:17**: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*.”
  5. Well, the excitement in the court is at fever pitch because everyone can see that your case hangs on one very important question. And it is this question that the defense lawyer now asks: Have you believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? And you answer, Yes, I have embraced Christ as my Saviour and Lord. I know that He is the Son of God. I recognize Him as the Saviour who I need. He is my highest joy!
     1. Now, the defense lawyer is very clever. He knows that the Bible says that not everyone who claims to be a believer is a believer. So He leans in even further and he asks you how the court can be sure that your profession of faith is a true profession of faith? And you explain that Jesus said, “*Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit … Thus you will recognize them by their fruits*.”
     2. Well, that’s putting it on the line, isn’t it! For this can be tested. So now the defense lawyer calls your wife/husband, your flatmates, your school mates, your work colleagues, your children/parents, to the stand, as character witnesses, and he asks each of them if there is evidence of a growth of just three things in you – love, humility, and patience? And one by one they all testify that though you are not perfect, they can see that you have grown in these things. They have experienced your love and your humility and your patience, more so this year than last year.
  6. My friend, is that how it would go if it were you in the dock? How would you answer those two questions?
     1. Have you believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? Have you embraced Christ as your Saviour and Lord. Is He your highest joy!
     2. And if we brought your husband/wife, flatmates, schoolmates, work colleagues, children/parents into the dock? Would they say, Yes, we see good fruit? We see growth in godliness?

Your only hope of escaping a guilty verdict in heaven’s courtroom is to be regenerated/born again/made new. Has this happened to you? Are you a child of God; a new creation? I hope you can say, Yes! And if you can’t, humble yourself before God, today, and confess your sins. Embrace Christ as your Saviour, now. To God be the glory. Amen.