

The Gospel as “Counter Intelligence”

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Three main questions urge consideration of the idea that the Word of God is not providing information to a ready, eager, positive listener, but is providing “counter-intelligence” in response to a contrary and contradictory human nature.

1. **What is the relationship between the Word of God and human nature under original sin?**
2. **Is there a difference between the determination of human nature to contradict God and human nature’s ability to act upon that determination?**
3. **Is the Gospel a system of information that must be possessed to some high degree in order to be affective or is the Gospel a default system which possesses all who lack the capacity to wrench themselves free of it?**¹

1. What is the relationship between the Word of God and human nature under original sin?² Is the gospel simply information required by human intellect to make a decision for salvation? Humanism and “enlightenment” perspectives insist that any reasonable person, with reasonable information will make reasonable choices. For example, the drowning person instinctively climbs upon anyone or anything in order to live. The threatened person quickly assesses options and chooses the one that will most likely result in life. Yet in the aggregate, our daily decisions are contrary to the wisdom of life. Decisions of people since the fall are consistently self destructive (eg. diet, entertainment, activities, inactivity). From this vantage point would the gospel be considered “counter-intelligence” necessary to counteract the noisy contradictions and nonsense of human intellect turned against the design of the Creator? This noisy contradiction is the product of original sin, is inescapable in humans, and must be contained in order to make way for the gospel.

2. Is there a difference between the determination of human nature to contradict God and human nature’s ability to act upon that determination? This distinction explains the Bible’s testimony about the ability of children and disability of adults in matters of faith. In popular Christian theology children are consistently viewed as “incapable” of faith because they lack the intellectual ability to process the data. Adult human nature (now mature and a robust host for original sin) is considered to be not only necessary but even the optimum setting for faith. This thinking fails to recognize the reality of original sin and is in utter contradiction of the biblical witness.³

¹ See chart under point 9 in index.

² The expression “Word of God” assumes the distinction between law and gospel. Do both law and gospel “shut every mouth” (Rom 3.19) or is there a positive relationship between the gospel and fallen human nature?

³ For example, Jesus and children in contrast to the disciple’s rebuke. A related question, “Is Christianity and the salvation it enjoys primarily what you know or where you live, acquaintance with or connection to, cerebral or nutritional?” + the issue of which nature will dominate in the believer, depends on presence or absence of Word, not on how hard one tries.

Original sin in fallen man is neither inactive nor benign. Yet, there seems to have been no time since Christ that people have not, either passively or vigorously, denied or minimized the affects of original sin. This denial forces corruption and misunderstanding of every other theological truth. For example, the Apology of the Augsburg confession responds to those who “miss the main issue.”⁴ Here the apology complains that people ignore the more serious faults of human nature, including despising God and hating his judgment. Popular modern theology is no less erroneous. Billy Graham in his book, *How to be born again*, explains “... I can control my will ... I can give my will to God and I do.”⁵ What Graham assumes is that human nature is capable and desirous of coming to God. In contrast to Graham, the biblical witness exposes the magnitude of original sin’s dastardly force. Original sin in every human being since Adam is an active, contentious, intense contradiction of God’s design. If one would object with examples of good people who did good things all their lives, we would suggest that even there original sin is insidious, as it causes those good things to be understood as justifying the doer. Original sin is still in character even when it allows a certain amount of apparent goodness in order to displace grace and the genuine righteousness of faith with the illusion of righteousness by our works. Good works are of no threat to the goals of sin as long as the good worker grows old and dies contradicting and apart from the righteousness of Christ.

Seeing original sin and its consequences for human nature in as negative light as possible, offers a reliable perspective from which to make sense of the biblical witness regarding such fundamental doctrines as the universal atonement, anthropology, conversion, and revelation. Indeed, of the fundamental doctrines, the first is original sin, which must be understood if a human being is going to consider the significance of a redeemer⁶.

Anthropology. There is nothing positive to be said about the affects of original sin on human ability, especially in regard to spiritual matters. Nevertheless, we must recognize that most of humanity disagrees. Evolutionists, atheists, humanists, Billy Graham, Walt Disney and Thomas the Tank Engine all contend that every human being is basically good. We have our challenges and short-comings, but with the right environment and information, we can do what is right. The Pharisees vigorously insisted that they were free. Yet their own history, current situation, and the response of Jesus in John 8 clearly demonstrate that they remained in bondage. To think that humanity is still able, albeit impaired, is simply untenable, yet the human ego is unrelenting.

Popular Anthropology. Popular anthropology is itself a product of original sin in human self-deception. Comments regarding the disposition of a person who is a believer continue to raise concerns about a right understanding of human nature under original sin. People often speak of human nature as being only “potentially” contrary to the gospel, “but a believer can still reject the gospel.” But this is still minimizing reality. Like the story of the “Little Engine that Could,” human nature under original sin

⁴ Apology Article II:8 in The Book of Concord, Tappert Edition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959).

⁵ Billy Graham, *How to be Born Again* (Waco: Word, 1977) 160. The more glaring problem is that of, why would an unsaved person pursue such a text? And if a person is already saved, they wouldn’t need to pursue the book.

⁶ See T.H. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934).

contradicts biblical revelation by chanting, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can...” What kind of human arrogance teaches children that “they can be anything they want, if they just try hard enough”? Among adults we may note the prevalence of English Bible translations which transform simple words like “believe” with longer clauses like, “put their faith in...” These translations betray an imposition of emphasis on human ability and activity. Saying, “Put your faith in God” sounds as if “faith” is a substance possessed by every human who must decide where to invest that in order to achieve the highest return. Saying, “Believe and you will be saved” is understood as if it seeks a decision from people possessing free will⁷.

Biblical Anthropology. Just how bad is the condition of human nature under the burden of original sin? Biblical anthropology is a description of reality, consistently verified by observation. According to Ephesians 2 we are dead in our trespasses and sins. As a dead person lacks any capacity to hear, consider what was heard, make decisions, or act on those decisions, so is human nature in relation to spiritual things. Still, this does not yet express the severity of the situation. Paul, in Romans 5, describes our condition in terms that raise increasing alarm. First Paul says we are “without strength,” then “ungodly,” then “sinners” and finally “enemies of God.” The expression “without strength” clearly excludes any human capacity to live before God, but the situation is more desperate than that. Paul next uses the term “ungodly” to explain that the only capacity we do have is oriented away from God. This orientation away from God is to be understood as all the more troublesome because it is energetic and rebellious. As if all this were not enough, Paul’s description of human nature crescendos in the last term, “enemies of God.” Human nature under original sin is active, intense and utterly antagonistic toward God.

The truth of original sin requires us to recognize that human beings are “three dimensional.” That is to say, we possess body, soul, and spirit. Popular theology persistently sees human beings as one dimensional; a single, indivisible entity. This explains humanity’s pathetic need to always say the nicest things about people, to contend that they are basically good and wanting to make good choices if only they have the opportunity⁸. A one dimensional perspective on humanity is unable to make sense of any of the biblical witness because it cannot distinguish law from gospel nor flesh from regenerated soul (old man, new man).⁹ Consider for example Paul’s expressed frustration in Romans 7. A one dimensional perspective can only suggest that Paul suffers from multiple personality syndrome and needs medication¹⁰. In a way, the multiple personality diagnosis is correct as Paul is contrasting the insatiable desire of his human nature to do wrong, with the inspired orientation of his regenerated soul to do right as enabled by the Holy Spirit. John also assumes this distinction in his gospel and epistles. Thus, when John talks about “he who does not believe” and “he who does believe” he is not primarily

⁷ See T.H. Mueller’s article, “Repentance and Faith: Who Does the Turning?”

⁸ Consider how this impacts and thus cripples the discipline of education, social services, government policy, etc.

⁹ Paul requires just such a distinction in those who would teach, 1 Timothy 1:8-9, 2 Timothy 2:15. It seems to me that one dimensional perspectives also cannot account for the death of a believer. Either you are a reformed Bible believer who is right with God, in which case you should live as long as you remain so (Galatians 3:12) or you must distinguish between a believing soul/spirit and a body that must perish because it will never be reformed.

¹⁰ Check The Romans Debate for citation

concerned with comparing this man, say Billy Graham, with that man, David Hume. Rather, John assumes that the reader distinguishes between “that which is born of the flesh” (the unbelieving human nature and intellect which we all possess until death) and “that which is born of the Spirit” (the believing regenerate soul that cannot sin).

Original Sin in Maturing Human Nature

The opposition of human nature to God becomes more sophisticated and contentious over time; generally and individually. More sophisticated complex deception requires more sophisticated complex articulations of the truth (the three creeds for example). These more sophisticated articulations give the impression that saving faith is, itself, organically complex, therefore outside the range of infants or children. But that impression is itself, an aberration produced by sophisticated human ego. Highly developed human intellect does not normally serve but undermines the truth.¹¹ Thus it requires sophisticated and powerful refutation in order to restore the dependence and disability of infancy. But this does not necessarily require complexity. On the contrary, one characteristic of truth is its simplicity.¹² The Sermon on the Mount is a splendid example of sophisticated error refuted by truth expressed in its simplicity. Six times Jesus exposes the corrosive effects of human intellect on the law with the following words, “You have heard that it was said...” Each time Jesus offers the simple truth as the means to counter the sophistry which twisted God’s intent. All of the Sermon is corrective, though the other correctives are not introduced with that formula. Jesus provides corrections in simple language in order to counter the contradiction of the convoluted, self serving doctrine of the Jewish hierarchy. Matthew 23 records yet another occasion where Jesus responds to the sophistry of the Pharisees in blistering yet simple language.

The contradictory nature of human thought and its subtlety can be seen today in another example of mis-translation. Several popular English translations consistently translate “keep” as “obey.”¹³ By using “thre/w” Jesus emphasizes the idea of “clinging to” or “remaining in” the Word. Obedience is the product of the Word/Spirit’s presence in the regenerate soul. Jesus certainly does not mean that if you think it over and decide to obey the law, then you will be accepted by Him as a disciple.¹⁴ Thus revelation is required, not to inform a contentious and contradictory human intellect, but to disable that intellect. Children are presented as the standard of faith because their human nature, disabled by immaturity, is thus unable to serve as an agent of the original sin that dwells within it. The grave danger posed by maturing human nature under original sin is articulated consistently by God in his severe opposition to the proud, Proverbs 8:13 “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” Thus the Word of God is necessary for the life of a Christian, not as interesting data to await consultation as needed by an amiable intellect, but as a dynamic force that keeps the advancement of lies and deceit in check.¹⁵ Consider at this point, how people have dislocated the spirit/word from their lives, and in so doing have disarmed themselves. People normally speak of “going to church” as if the “church building” is the place where the word of God resides. The Word of God limited to a few short readings weekly in a building of stone is of little help to an individual soul assaulted by a deluge of arrogant human invention¹⁶. The human body is intended to be the temple

¹¹ Science provides innumerable examples, evolution is perhaps the best known.

¹² Consider, for example, Jesus’ response to the Pharisees regarding marriage and divorce in Matthew 19.

of the Holy Spirit. His presence alone is capable of sustaining dominance of truth and faith over arrogance, lies, and unbelief.

3. Is the Gospel a system of information that must be possessed to some high degree in order to be affective or is the Gospel a default system which possesses all who lack the capacity to wrench themselves free of it? The disabling affects of original sin are themselves disabled by revelation provided in nature and in the Holy Scriptures. Nature disallows the intent of original sin in human nature by a variety of physical circumstances; infancy, infirmity, accident, old age, and a host of other disabling circumstances. Paul refers to this “natural” disability in 1 Corinthians 1, “For you see your calling brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called ... but God has chosen the things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are.”¹⁷ Though the circumstances vary, they have the same affect of bringing a human being to the helpless condition of an infant.

Infancy is the most obvious and common state of natural disability. This is not to say that infants are innocent, they are not. The original sin present in the flesh/mind of an infant is as insidious as the adult’s. The difference is that the immaturity of the infant’s human physiology *naturally, circumstantially* prevents original sin from realizing its orientation. The very definition of “infancy” depends on a human being’s disability due to lack of development. Infants stay where you put them, eat what you feed them, go where you take them, bath when you wash them, and listen to what you tell them. This is not to say that an intensely disagreeable original sin does not lurk within, nor that the infant will not voice objections. The point is that their disability holds them under the advantages of those who would provide for their life and well-being. As soon as a child is able to squirm out of their parent’s arms, run away, hide, disagree, refuse, and resist, they are no longer infants and no longer safe under the providence of their parents.

Matthew records several bold and clear statements of Jesus in regard to children. In 6 verses Jesus said the following, “Unless you repent and become as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven” (18:3), “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (18:4), “ ... but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a milestone hung round his neck and be drowned in the sea” (18:6), “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (18:10), “Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (18:14) and “Let the little children come to me and stop forbidding them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (19:14). We should note that in the midst of these references to the faith of children Jesus issues his most severe warning to adults, warning His listeners that if some part of their body would cause them to sin, they should cut that member off!” When Jesus speaks this way of children, what can He be referring to except the absence of human abilities under original

¹³ The New Century Version has, “if you continue to obey”, the NIV has “if you hold to,” while the revised Beck translation has “if you remain.”

¹⁴ Compare the Israelite’s history of talking of obedience and failing with Jesus’ numerous descriptions of the relationship between trees/vines and fruit.

¹⁵ Consider how Jesus indicates this in Matthew 12 where he warns of leaving a soul unfilled with the Spirit, in which case demons return to possess the house in a worse manner than before.

¹⁶ For example, the popular self-glorification of science by describing their inventions as progress or the “age of information.”

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:26, 28a.

sin that always seek to displace faith? If so, then in the absence of contradiction and contrary ability, human nature finds itself in the state of faith.

OT History as Paradigmatic. Biblical history bears witness to the fact that children came and went with their parents and experienced the consequences along with them. Joshua was able to bring into the promised land all of the children of the exodus, while Moses was unable to bring any of the adults or himself. The Lord comments in Numbers 14:31 "...but your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in and they shall know the land which you have despised." The exclusion of capable adults and inclusion of children disabled by way of immaturity is referred to as paradigmatic by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 and the letter to the Hebrews chapter 3. The indication of faith in the children resides in the fact that they lacked the human intellectual capacity to disagree, though surely they possess a human nature that is disagreeable.

Even Lutheran hymnody has recognized this contrast between mature and immature human nature as is evident in LW 318 v.2 "... If you cannot rouse the wicked with the judgment's dread alarms, You can lead the little children to the Savior's waiting arms." This hymn verse, like the biblical texts above, reflect the fact that the real challenge for faith is to exist again in the life of the adult human being.

Is it possible that the faith required for salvation is simply "disability," the absence of opposition? Thus the purpose and need of the revealed Word for all the wonders and glory it reveals, is primarily for the restoration of this absence. Hence, the Word of God is necessary to "counter the intelligence" of adult human intellect. Both law and gospel eliminate the voice of human self assertion and self-justification, leaving the adult in an infant like state of faith. Faith requires information only to the extent that unbelief must be contradicted. This is what Jeremiah and John speak of when they declare that those generated by God according to the New Testament do not need to be taught but know all things (Jeremiah 31:31-34, 1 John 2:20, 27).

Infirmity and Disability

Chronological infancy is not the only state that renders a person faithful due to the inability to sustain faithlessness. The Gospels are filled with examples of people who sought and received the mercies of the Lord because they lacked any alternative. For example, the woman with the flow of blood, the Syro-Phonician woman, and the widow of Nain had all exhausted any hope of help by human intervention. Lepers and Centurions also sought the Lord and found help in the face of impossibility. Interestingly, old age holds the potential of drawing human nature back into an infant like state. Is this another example of God's providence and wisdom in providing the greatest possibility for all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth? Gravity draws us continually back down to the reality of our inability, something an infant has no misconceptions about. For example, Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth all found themselves at the mercy of God to provide a conception since by reason of age it was now clearly impossible for them to do so.

Disability by Dire Straights

Besides the quiet, long term effects of gravity, there are dire straights that yield a child like condition. Jesus was consistently sought out by the helpless. Matthew 8 and Acts 8 each record the miraculous affects of the gospel among those were considered unable to meet the rigorous requirements of the Jewish faith. Matthew records Jesus healing a leper, a Roman centurion's servant, and Peter's mother-in-law, while Luke

records Philip preaching the gospel successfully to Samaritans, the Ethiopian Eunuch, and the people of Azotus of the Philistines. From a Jewish perspective, these people were clearly unable to approach the requirements established by arrogant human nationalism, yet it is precisely that disability that puts them in a condition to be saved.

Matthew and Zacchaeus faced impossible circumstances due to their occupation. Roman sentiment considered them disabled by virtue of their nationality and because they were, in a sense, traitors against their own people. Jewish religious leadership, if not the whole nation, considered them so despicable that redemption was impossible. In their case, the conclusions of Roman and Jewish opinion provided the “counter-intelligence” that left them disabled. Jesus’ provided what they could not do by calling them with an inspired Word. The history of Lazarus and the rich man is provided to make this point by way of contrast. The gospel of Luke, perhaps even more than Matthew, focuses on the fact that those who were considered to be out are in and those who considered themselves to be in are out.

Disability by Trials and Temptations

Finally, the consequences of original sin in a fallen world also work to drive human arrogance to an admission of disability. This makes sense of the biblical witness regarding affliction. For example, James expressly states that God tempts no one, yet the same word is used with God as subject in the Greek OT text of Genesis 22. What this reveals is that God is behind and working through circumstances that include a host of others agents. It was God who incited the devil against Job. Both God and the devil are “testing/tempting” (peirazw/) Job, the difference is their goal. God tested Abraham (Genesis 22) and the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the Devil (Matthew 4). James assumes we know that goal, which is the confirming of Job in the faith which comes to pass by his unavoidable situation of disability (James 1:2-3, 5:11).

Another example is provided in Psalm 119. Over the course of 6 verses the Psalm reveals God’s purpose in affliction.

Verse 50 “This is my comfort in my affliction for your word has given me life.”

Verse 67 “Before I was afflicted I went astray but now I keep your word.”

Verse 71 “It was good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes.”

Verse 75 “I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.”

Verse 92 “Unless your law had been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.”

Verse 107 “I am afflicted very much; Revive me, O Lord, according to your Word.”

The progression shows that affliction is designed to force individuals to recognize their own limitations, even to the point of being utterly disabled. This is the condition present in infants, which makes them the model of faith. Such afflicted, disabled people are not without a human nature affected by original sin, but their circumstances render that human nature unable to contradict the reality of their helplessness. In other words, in the absence of contradiction, the grace of God is effective.

Other biblical texts simply express this activity of God in terms of its purpose. Leviticus 26 consists of a cadence. God promises to meet the opposition of fallen human nature with His own opposition. His purpose is to continue to meet the ever mounting,

obstinate opposition of human nature with an ever greater counter opposition. God's intent is to shatter human notions of self sufficiency. Paul, through his experience of affliction came to the right conclusions as he expresses them in 2 Corinthians 3:4-5 "And we have such faith through Christ toward God, Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."¹⁸

Deuteronomy 32:20, Hosea 5:23ff, and 2 Corinthians 1:9, 4:1ff all express the same fact of God's intervention against the intent of original sin through human nature. For example, Hosea says "... I, even I, will tear them, and no one shall rescue. I will return again to My place, till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me." Moses rehearsed the effectiveness of God's dealing thus with His people in Deuteronomy 8:3, 19-20, "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the out of the Lord."

In any case, neither infirmity nor dire straights guarantees a childlike faith. In fact, the same tenacity of mature human nature under original sin that contradicts faith may also stubbornly contradict every circumstantial demonstration of the same. Nevertheless, God's activity in the physical lives of people is meant to and often does bring about a disability which prevents original sin from contradicting the affects of universal atonement. Original sin would surely prevent this but cannot do so due to underdeveloped or lapsed ability. Infants will surely grow into the contradiction of original sin, as expressed by them in terms like, "No!" and "I can do it myself." The reader will note the self-destructive nature being insisted upon by a toddler making such bold assertions. These contradictions are increased during teen years as they add a sense of intuitive superiority (they know more than anyone) and immortality (they will never suffer defeat or injury) to their earlier assertions. As full blown adults, original sin feels secure in its ability to satisfy itself, on its own terms. Even the Christian mission is regularly subverted to serve the ego of fallen human nature. Only with the onset of inescapable circumstances or the impression of the word of God can this situation be reversed. Thus we turn our attention from physical circumstances to divine activity through the revealed word.

The Bible Produces Circumstances that re-produce disability

God has not left natural circumstances as the only means of disabling contradictory human nature. His inspired Word is also provided as a means of dealing with the intent and energy of original sin in human nature in several different ways and contexts.

First, the gospel narratives demonstrate the difficulty of countering the contrary intelligence of mature human nature. As often as Jesus met the presumed intelligence of people, He countered that presumed intelligence with truth. The Gospel of John offers 4 stunning examples in Jesus' dialog with adults whose human nature was fully mature and capable of serving the intents of original sin; Nicodemus (John 3), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), the Jews who followed Jesus after He fed them in the wilderness (John 6), and one particular argument He had with the Pharisees (John 8). In each of these instances, Jesus is confronted with contradictions to faith produced by original sin in human nature. The response of Jesus and subsequent counter-responses reveal that as

¹⁸ Paul addresses his affliction again in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Jesus overcame human objections, human nature continued to invent more objections. So the battle increased more and more. The intent of human nature is to argue its self-sufficiency. The intent of Jesus is to disable this determination of human nature and return the individual(s) to consciousness of his/her dependence on God. Paul states expressly that this is the purpose of the law, “to stop every mouth” (Romans 3:19).

Second, an ever increasing sophistication of original sin in human nature explains a necessity and an illusion. Sophisticated arguments against the truth require even more sophisticated counter arguments if human nature is to be or remain disabled. Over the centuries this has given the mistaken impression that the Christian faith is ever so intricate and complex, therefore out of the reach of the simple and only accessible to those possessing great human intellectual abilities. This is the reverse of the truth. Consider the possibility that John’s gospel was written last and at the end of the first century as a corrective for the lapse of NT people into the patterns of OT people. Human nature in the OT had produced the deception that religion can be manipulated. Thus Israel regularly went through the external, physical motions of religion all the while contradicting its essence and content. This pattern was repeating itself in the first century of the NT. In order to counter this pattern, John intentionally avoided any account of and any positive view of external religious practices. John noticeably avoids narrative of the sacraments and the Lord’s Prayer. Instead, John focuses on the necessity of one’s relationship with the Word of God. Only the Word of God can prevent self-deception. Only the Word of God can keep human nature under original sin from displacing faith with intellectual invention.

Third, if we know all things, as John declares twice (1 John 2:20, 27) then why all the commands to teach? No sense can be made of this if we view human beings as one dimensional. From a three dimensional perspective John makes perfect sense. According to a regenerate soul filled with the Spirit, the Christian knows all things. For such a person the Word is not given as data but as remedy. The determination of human nature to deny its own disability and to displace the truth with its own inventions must be countered continually with the genuine intelligence of God. The question then is not, “is this or that person smart enough to grasp real theology?” but, “is it possible to remove the arrogance of human intellect so that faith is dominant and conscious?”

Fourth, Deuteronomy 6:4 and Ephesians 6:4 impress with imperative language the necessity of raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Though original sin may not be able to act on its determination due to immaturity/infancy, maturity is coming as each moment passes. This continual maturing of human nature makes that nature continually more capable of contradicting faith. Thus, the Word of God is provided as a counter measure. As human nature would begin to assert the lie of its own ability, the Law would crush that lie with its demands of perfection. As human nature would deceive itself about the nature or purpose of love, the gospel would refute all such notions.¹⁹ Thus the word must remain present as counter-intelligence if the faith of the infant is to endure.

¹⁹ Note how the flood and the Red Sea kills and saves in the same event. The difference has to do with one’s relationship with the Word of God. For those who ignored, mocked, and despised God’s Word, the water means condemnation. For those who listened to the Word of God (due to their inability to do otherwise), the water is a means of salvation.

Fifth, David expresses the need to replace perverse human thinking with divine in the psalms, for example, 119:144, “Give me understanding and I shall live.” This thought is echoed throughout proverbs by parallel admonitions, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding ... Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:5, 7).

Sixth, Paul saw evidence of this pattern in his own life and provided a warning for us, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). The inclination of human nature and necessity of disabling it is further revealed in God’s providing a thorn in Paul’s flesh (2 Corinthians 13).

Seventh, the history of doctrine and doctrinal disputes provides further evidence of the increasing contrary intelligence / counter-intelligence phenomena. Consider the three ecumenical creeds, each successive creed providing more detail and responding to more recent assaults of a contradictory human intellect. The early church fathers, the Lutheran confessions, the whole history of Christianity to this day is a history of the ever mounting contradiction of human nature and the necessary counter-contradiction provided by the Word of God through regenerate souls in service of God. On the other hand, Psalm 119 points out that the Word (in its simplicity for those of simple faith) makes one wiser than those who are considered more capable, mature, and intelligent in this progression; one’s enemies (v. 98), teachers (v. 99) and elders (v. 100).

Sacraments are Counter-Intelligence. If the natural man receives not the things of the spirit, what then is the purpose of attaching physical means to the Word of God in the sacraments. The sacraments are another example of a simple, not a complex, counter measure for the noisy contradiction of human nature.²⁰ When human nature contends that we should abandon the gospel for its inability to “really” change our situation before God, the regenerate soul may counter with a physical argument, “but the water of baptism touched me,” “but the bread and wine passed my lips and these are evidence of God’s pardon.” On the one hand the sacraments are provided as a physical means of meeting the contentions of human contradiction. On the other hand the Word which makes the sacraments meaningful is spiritual food for the regenerate soul. Neither of these purposes looks anything like providing data to an inquiring mind, much less a privilege that an individual must possess but not actually exercise. The special revelation of God in His Word and Sacraments clarifies and confirms the physical witness of general revelation in nature (Romans 1, Psalm 19) and responds to the internal assaults of the guilty heart (Romans 2).

Silence as the Final Expression of Counter-Intelligence. There are indications in the Bible that at a certain point God expresses His judgment on those who oppose Him with silence. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns about casting pearls before swine. This injunction provides the general principle that would keep us from applying any of the means of grace to those whose human natures are not held in check by the word. Jesus is, at times, remarkably silent before his accusers. This is an indication of judgment, as was God’s silence after Malachi. Jesus only spoke during his trial when it was necessary for Him to speak the truth and prevent lies from being accepted and

²⁰ Consider the history of objections to the sacraments in comparison to the simple words by which Christ established them. Also, remember how Luther wrote, “This is My body” and “This is My blood” on the table before he began his debate with Zwingli.

perpetuated. If mature human nature refuses to listen to the Word of God, the only means of communicating left is silence. Unfortunately, the pseudo-intelligence of human nature interprets silence as consent.

Universal Atonement is not Universalism. How is the universal atonement to be understood if human ability is still in place? The arguments offered in this paper do not lead to universalism, though they invert common notions about who can and will be saved. On the one hand, there is always a danger of universalism since human nature would prefer to make eternal life automatic. On the other hand, a capable, rational human being rejects the need for any such universal atonement since the capable human adult is fully able to make the right choices and thus endear him or herself to God completely on his or her own terms. Yet in reality, a vicious, contradictory humanity has no hope apart from the very universal atonement it condemns as unnecessary and ridiculous. So a universal atonement is needed, and is provided. However, the goal of atonement remains in jeopardy, for every human nature thus redeemed is still determined to escape from that atoning work with bitter contempt. The apostles expressed this reality with the plain question, “Who then can be saved?”²¹

Is it possible that the Gospel saves the greatest number of people rather than the least, the high or the low, the able or incapable? Is it possible that the universal atonement of Christ is effective all the way to the edge of determined contradiction? Do Matthew and Hebrews teach us that the unforgivable sin is not a lack of something good but the stubborn presence of that which denies the Good? Does the idea that circumstances render a person disabled and so by default under the grace of Christ diminish our concern to keep people firmly rooted and grounded in the Word? We avoid all the dangers considered by paying close attention to these two realities. First, the universal atonement of Christ is real and includes anyone who does not succeed in pressing their way out from under its benefits. On the other hand, original sin is just the determined contradiction that would press its way out unless something disables it. These disabling means may be natural revelation through physical circumstances and/or super-natural revelation in the Word. If the universal atonement and vulnerability of human nature to disability are true, then the gospel would be God’s default system. In the absence of determined contradiction, by whatever means, a person falls under the blessing of universal atonement, though in time they may not have realized the benefits of that atonement.

If the gospel is God’s default system to save the disabled, what becomes of the able? Human nature under original sin unchecked persists in determined contradiction, thinking itself too capable, too high, too self-sufficient to submit to God. If God says “get low and be saved thus” the high and mighty disdain, “I will not.” If such are lost, by what means will they claim injustice on God’s part? If God requires something of which we are incapable and condemns us accordingly, then we might argue that He is at fault (though Paul disallows this in Romans 9). But if God requires something of which everyone is capable, “be still and know that I am God,” then by what means would those who insist on making noisy contradiction object to their condemnation? In the meantime anyone made low by circumstance or by affect of the Word is saved.

²¹ Matthew 19:23-26. Note here a popular explanation that claims that the “eye of a needle” was a low gate which a camel could pass through, but only on its knees – difficult but not impossible. Notice then, how that explanation ignores the point that Jesus expressly makes in verse 26!

Gospel as the Default System. The narrative of the bronze serpent records just such a situation. Who cannot be saved from the serpent's bite? Only those who refuse to look at the pole, something easily within the physiological ability of those bitten. Why not look and be healed? Only the stubborn contradiction of human nature responds, "How can that possibly help?" Interestingly, Jesus recalls this occasion as paradigmatic for His own crucifixion in John 3, "Just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so must the son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him might not perish..." (3:14-15a). What is it about the bronze serpent episode that makes it necessary for the Christ to be lifted up? Admitting the accursedness, not blessedness of one's own life is what is required. The serpent brought the poison of contradiction to human thinking. Looking at the serpent is admitting that such contradictory thinking is accursed and must be displaced by the simple Word/activity of the Redeemer.

The term "patience" (makroqumi/a) is another witness. This term for God's patience means that God waits over time for two things. On the one hand, God waits in the life of the disabled believer so that the conviction is ever stronger that salvation comes by the grace of God in spite of the natural inclinations of the individual. On the other hand, God waits on the life of the unbeliever for his conversion or until it becomes undeniable that his condemnation is in no way owing to a deficiency on God's part. Even the condemned must admit in judgment that God was clearly just and patient, but they simply would not have it (Lazarus and the Rich Man, for example).

1 Corinthians 1 is another witness to salvation by default. God chose those already low to disgrace those who make and/or consider themselves high, too high to submit to God's activity on their behalf (while they already despicably deny the necessity of His making their heart beat and sun shine).

Now the expression of 2 Timothy 2:14 may be taken seriously. God's desire that all be saved is confirmed undeniably in the universal atonement. But if that atonement only benefits the few who possess the intellect and discernment to grasp its complexity, how does it fulfill his will? If God really desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, wouldn't part of His wisdom provide just the default system described above? So, what does become of infants who die without baptism, of the mentally impaired, the aged with dementia, the infirm and disabled? Popular Christian thinking, at best, commits the disabled to the mercies of God while assuming confidence about the eternal life of people who possessed the capabilities of human nature which calls salvation into question. Attention to this perspective allows a reader to note how biblical texts and history continue to deal with mature human nature, human nature that feels fully capable. Infants and children are not the problem being addressed, rather they are brought and find blessing. Adults are those who not only have torn themselves away from infant dependency but are also now engaged in tearing others away (Matthew 23:12-13, Romans 1:32).

Conclusions.

So, "knowledge" in the Bible is not about essential data for making the right choice but for disallowing every suggestion of human conception because such suggestions will always be inadequate and destructive²². Notice how Acts 11 and 15

²² Romans 10 gives the impression of seeking a response of human nature on the basis of information. However, the context makes it clear that Paul is rejecting just such sophistry on the part of the Jews, and

record this clash coming to a head. In both Jerusalem councils the singular truth of the Gospel is expressed in increasingly intense language in order to protect the Christian mission from the persistent contradiction of human thought²³.

Human nature is absolutely and categorically unable to believe in God since the fall. At the same time, human nature continually pours forth thinking that is contentious, noisy, and contradictory to truth and mercy. Human nature's only hope is for God to provide a new creation, a regenerate soul filled with His Spirit that knows all things, believes all things, and hopes all things of God. As significant as this new creation is, the nature of human flesh is not changed by it. The best one may hope for is to reduce/contain the noise and constrain human nature as an unwilling participant in the Christian life. Paul expresses this situation in language that requires the "crucifixion" and "pummeling and subduing" of human nature (Colossians 3:5, 1 Corinthians 9:27).

Holy Scripture teaches neither universalism nor humanism. We take the universal atonement seriously and we take human nature seriously. Anyone is under the atonement of Christ who has not successfully forced themselves out from under it & every human nature would/will do just that if not counteracted by God via Word and/or circumstance.²⁴

contending that no saving faith nor confirming confession can be made unless the Word successfully counters the presumptuous intelligence of human nature.

²³ Along these lines we might consider the prevalence of imperatives to "remember" and to "not forget." Peter uses the term "remind" in various forms 5 times in the first chapter of his second epistle.

²⁴ Not this thesis, but our current practice of confirmation/Lord's Supper/Church membership apart from the word, does not take original sin seriously.

Appendix A
INVERTED THINKING contrary to reality and revealed Word

1. **Heaven is so hard to obtain** that only the most capable few will succeed? No, the Vicarious Atonement is affective unless prevented from being so.
 - a. Takes 1 Timothy 2:4 and John 3:16 seriously
 - b. Grace is in effect unless condemnation is demanded by human arrogance; God is LOVE, not law. The law is a function of God's love, supporting His creative design

2. Only the most capable **human minds can succeed**? No, human ability opposes its own good, including God's gracious providence
 - a. Takes 1 Corinthians 1, 10 and Hebrews 2-4 seriously
 - b. Human nature under original sin is never really rational in the sense of being oriented toward true life according to God's design.

3. The **Bible simply provides simple data** that the sophisticated and capable human mind can rationally consent to? No, the Gospel is not provided as data for a rational mind but as counter-intelligence and the antidote for the mind.
 - a. Takes Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 18 seriously
 - b. The Word of God and history of Christian dogma become more complex and sophisticated only as necessary to meet the increasingly complex and sophisticated contradiction of the human mind during its lifetime and of humanity as a whole over all time.

Appendix B

Propositions for Further Consideration

“Heaven is Hard to Obtain?”

1. The inability to contradict & dependence of an undeveloped (or disabled) human nature is essentially the faith that the Word would produce in the capable person by expelling all thoughts to the contrary.
2. Complexity of dogma does not prove the inability of the simple, but the necessity of simplicity. Simplicity is the antidote for contradiction and the challenge of meeting an ever increasing assault of convoluted objections produced by human arrogance.

“Human Minds Can Succeed?”

3. Popular thinking moves along these lines; People are basically good, singular, and able to make good decisions if given a chance. Since we are judged according to our decisions, children are excluded from accountability and incapable of faith. This is why Baptists require maturity and instruction before baptism and others require it before communion. But this does not take original sin, nor bondage of the will, nor the body/soul/spirit reality into account.
4. The orientation of original sin is to destroy both the individual and all things known and unknown to that individual. Original sin, oriented toward self destruction, in a maturing human nature continues to grow more intense and sophisticated in its contradiction of faith, truth, and the gospel. This growth of intensity takes place in the individual over his life time and collectively in humanity over its lifetime.

“The Bible is Simply Data?”

5. Human nature under original sin will never, in anyway, be amiable or even tolerant of truth but will always reject or manipulate reality/information to its own destruction. Human nature will never acquiesce to or accept divine revelation (old wine/old skins).
6. Human nature, as it matures, is increasingly able to serve as a medium for original sin to express itself. Maturing/mature human nature is less capable NOT more capable of faith.
7. Human nature in the dependence/disability of infancy is the rule, not the exception to faith.
 - a. Barren – Hannah, Elizabeth
 - b. Senses – Blind, Deaf
 - c. Mechanical – Lamé
 - d. Challenged – “unable to speak well” (Moses), “uneducated men” (Peter & John)
 - e. Imposed – Saul confronted/blind, Peter sinking
 - f. Psalm 149:5 “Let the saints be joyful in glory; Let them sing aloud on their beds.” (Is dependence or disability what is meant by “beds”?)
8. Word is provided as remedy not information for human nature.
9. Faith must have specific content in direct proportion to the level of contradictory information present.

Appendix C
Questions for Further Consideration

1. Does a plea to God need to consist of accurate data or a certain amount of data? If it does or to the extent it does, is this in order for God to hear it or is this required for the plea to be made in the face of opposition from human nature? (Proverbs about God not hearing the prayer of the wicked contrasted with “fearing God” language in Proverbs and Acts).

2. How is it?
- a. The presence of positive information or
 - b. absence of contradiction that leaves one under Christ’s atonement?
 - c. The presence of contradiction or
 - d. absence of exact data that leaves one condemned?
 - e.

Intellect >>	Contrary	Disabled	Enabled
Popular theology	CONDEMNED		SAVED
Biblical theology	CONDEMNED	SAVED	

3. What about the necessity of articulation, Romans 10?
- a. Inability to
 - i. Leaves one under the proclamations of Christ
 - ii. Leaves one with Christ and Spirit un-contradicted
 - b. Ability to
 - i. Inevitably threatens and displays contradictory nature = need to counter
 - ii. Romans 10 against the Jewish ego
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 1 against the Greek ego
 - iv. John 3:16, Mark 16:16 – do NOT say “... if you believe and articulate...”
 - c. Scripture
 - i. Not written to children too young to read
 - ii. Written to those whose maturity makes them despise children
 - iii. Written to highlight the blessings of the disability of infancy and the curses of ability; Numbers 5, Matthew 18:3-5, 6, 10, 14, 19:14.

4. Relationship between Universal atonement, anthropology, original sin, Word/ministry;
- a. Is it possible that saving faith exists any time contradiction is absent?
 - i. **Psalm 34:18 “The Lord is near the brokenhearted”**
 - ii. **Psalm 85:10 “Salvation is near those who fear the Lord”**

Appendix D

Word as Counter-intelligence – Affects and Applications

1. Relationship with/to the Word
 - a. Makes constant connection with the Word essential. Warns of complacency based on acquaintance.
 - b. Presents human nature as contrary to real intelligence (wisdom)
 - c. Presents revealed Word, not as data feeding intelligence, but as counter intelligence
 - d. Infants are the rule, not the exception
2. Perspective on Missions
 - a. Answers the questions regarding those who “never had a chance to hear” and the injustice of God condemning such.
 - b. Answers the response of, “Why then do mission work?”
 - i. The benefits of Christianity are present as well as promised
 - ii. Why would we leave the matter up to natural circumstance when we have inspired revelation?
 - c. Seek open doors were disability has prepared the way
3. Perspective on Death of the Disenfranchised
 - a. Infants before and without baptism, infants aborted.
 - b. Mentally handicapped, elderly with dementia, those disabled by accident or illness.
4. Universal atonement and Universalism
 - a. Economy of disability (1 Corinthians 1)
 - b. Universal atonement (1 Timothy 2:4)
 - c. Faith is being flat on the floor. Dying, itself, would work to provide a state of infancy.
5. Sacraments & Christian Education
 - a. History of contradiction comes from adults, not children (1 Corinthians 11)
 - b. Education is not to inform a willing body, but to keep its contradictions in check (silenced). Psalm 26:2-3 “prove/test me...” = crush human nature (cf. Lev 26). Psalm 27.
 - c. Need to provide “counter-intelligence,” confirmation of grace in physical terms, and spiritual nourishment consistently from earliest moment. The Word is a dike, built ever higher and stronger against rising contradiction.
 - d. Youth work is essential since they hear the contradictory voices from without and within, possess the ability to follow simple and complex responses, and are not yet jaded by the failings of Christian ministry.
 - e. Consistency with Word and Practice provides response to Baptist criticisms of our inconsistency; baptism for infants but not the Lord’s Supper.
6. Preaching – distinction between natures
7. Christian life – no “have to’s”
8. Infants/disabled don’t argue in opposition
 - a. Bondage of will

- b. Compare infants/aged with teenagers/adults
- c. Waiting for an alligator to grow so you can reason with it
 - i. His orientation will not change
 - ii. His ability to act upon that orientation will become stronger