Adult Sunday School - Engaging God’s World: The Fall

Introduction:

This week we are continuing through Plantinga’s book “Engaging God’s World” which gives a good analysis on engaging culture through the basic tenets of the Gospel.

The chapter for this week is on The Fall.

Sin and the Fall:

This section isn’t specifically laid out in the book, but will use a lot of what is stated therein.

Genesis chapter 3 gives us an account of “the fall” of humanity. Adam and Eve were created in a relationship with God and were charged to be stewards of His world. In all the freedom they had they were given one thing that they were not allowed to do. “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.” (Genesis 3:3).

Adam and Eve, even though they were led by the serpent, put themselves at an equal or higher status than God’s commandment and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It was at this time that sin entered the world. Their sin became a part of them. Their moral nature was transformed and was passed on to their descendants. In other words, the first sin of Adam and Eve has spread and congealed into original sin – a tendency of the whole race, for which we bear the collective guilt. Humanity is now bent toward sin. (Plantinga pg. 54)

When sin entered the world it affected all of creation. From sin came violence, disease and death. Human beings began to turn from God and follow their own sinful paths, causing devastation to the world. To notice this, all a person has to do is look around. The news shows us stories of merciless dictators, remorseless killers, rapists, thieves, and murderers, even acts of negligence and indifference that have caused destruction. Human depravity is one doctrine of the Christian faith that can be proven. It was the result of two human beings putting themselves before God and their descendants following the same pattern of trying to displace God with something else.

God hates sin because sin disrupts peace and interferes with the way God wants things to be. God is for shalom and therefore against sin. (Plantinga pg. 51)

Corruption:

“Measuring the damage of the fall, the Belgic Confession states that by our original sin we human beings have ‘separated ourselves from God, who is our true life’ and have ‘corrupted our entire nature’” (Article 14). (Plantinga pg. 54)

There are two main ingredients for corruption. First, a corrupted person turns the gifts of God in their life away from the intended purpose. For example, a person with a great tactical mind and strongly gifted with leadership can corrupt those gifts to become a ruthless dictator. A prostitute corrupts beauty and love. People who have physical strength can become bullies. People with high intelligence and first-
class educations can focus on rising to the top of a corporate ladder and exploit others. Firstly, a corrupted person takes what God has given for good and turns it for evil.

Second, a corrupted person joins together what God has put asunder. (Plantinga pg. 55) The person pollutes his or her relationships with foreign elements that don’t belong in them, the same way a person would pollute a river by dumping toxic waste in it. They take something good and introduce something that doesn’t belong there and therefore corrupts it. In this manner people pollute sports with taunts and violence. They pollute friendship with selfishness and social ambition. An adulterer pollutes a marriage by adding in a third party, and so forth.

This corruption has affected all of humanity. Due to original sin, we are born sinners. We choose to sin because it has become our nature. Our gifts are corrupted and help to create and give way to more sin, further corrupting not just ourselves, but possibly others as well. A father who physically abuses his son disrupts his son’s character. The son then goes on to physically abuse his son. Victims victimize others and sin gains momentum, affecting lives that then intersect and affect other lives. Out of this interaction of sinful lives, corrupted cultures form, cultures in which sin has become expected and occasionally praised. In racist cultures racism is normal. In secular cultures indifference or defiance towards God is viewed as normal. As much as corrupted human character formed culture, culture then helps to form corrupted human character.

“Corruption is thus a dynamic motif of the Christian understanding of sin; it is not so much a particular sin as the multiplying power of all sin to spoil a good creation and to breach its defenses…” it is “a systemic and progressive devastation of our spiritual immune system that eventually breaks it down and opens the way for hordes of opportunistic sins. All this corruption amounts to a pervasive depravity of human nature, a condition Calvinists have traditionally called ‘total depravity.’” (Plantinga pg. 58)

This corruption and sin does however discount or overpower God’s work on the earth. While sin and evil has corrupted creation, it doesn’t discount the fact that it was originally declared good by God. The Holy Spirit then works in the world to maintain as much of that original goodness as possible. This work is often called “common grace”. Common grace is “the goodness of God shown to all, regardless of faith, consisting in natural blessings, restraint of corruption, seeds of religion and political order, and a host of civilizing and humanizing impulses, patterns, and traditions.” (Plantinga pg. 59) Common grace allows for the human conscious to exist in corrupted humanity. It is part of the reason why people don’t always choose the worst alternative. “Even in a fallen world, ordinary people practice ordinary kindness every day. They build hospitals, organize relief efforts, and manage twelve-step programs for addicts. A warring world that needs peace makers also has some…” (Plantinga pg. 58) Common grace is a demonstration of God’s love to all who are in the world right now.

However, without a true acceptance of Christ, through faith a person’s corrupted nature cannot change.

**Who’s to Blame?:**

Where does sin and corruption come from? Who’s at fault? Who’s to blame?
First, it is important to understand that God himself is incapable of performing sin. God can do all things except those which are against His nature, and as He is perfectly holy or without sin He is utterly incapable of performing any sinful action including leading or even tempting man into sin (James 1:13). In the Christian faith God’s holiness is non-negotiable.

Next, we move onto the one the New Testament calls Satan or the devil. “This is a figure of such power and wiliness that New Testament writers grudgingly title him ‘the ruler of the demons’ (Matt 12:24) or even ‘the god of this world’. Nonetheless, Satan is no match for Jesus Christ...nor can Satan wreck those who faithfully cling to Christ.” (Plantinga pg. 63). Satan can tempt but not coerce. While Satan himself is sinful and seeks to interfere with what God is doing, he himself does not make people to sin and neither do the “powers” what ever these mysterious things are that also seek to disrupt God’s order. The “powers” have already been deeply compromised by the greater power of God and therefore cannot rob us of all freedom and accountability.

Finally, it comes to us. Human beings are responsible for causing sin to enter the world. As stated before we were created to work and be with God. Adam and Eve then attempted to be “like God” and thereby cut themselves and the rest of humanity off from knowing a relationship with him. “Why would we and others live against God, who is our highest good, the source of our very lives? Why do we human beings live against each other, fighting over our cultural differences instead of enjoying them, envying each other’s gifts instead of celebrating them? Why would we human creatures live against the rest of creation, given its majesty and abundance? Why would we live against the purpose of our own existence?” (Plantinga pg. 64)

People know what is right and still choose to do what is wrong. Humanity has been corrupted down to its thinking. They resist the idea that God is the source of everything. They resist the idea that they do not belong to themselves, but to God. They resist the idea that they owe God their life and gratitude, and they resist the idea that we are finite beings, unable to understand the mysteries of God. The problem is that humanity has put its faith in nature or in them, instead of in God, like Adam and Eve, still blindly believing that they can be gods in themselves.

**Conclusion:**

God created the world and all that is in it for a purpose. Adam and Eve choosing to resist God allowed sin to enter the world and corrupt it. Sin and corruption has continued to this day as each generation is a product of Adam’s mistake and humanity cannot place the blame on anyone but themselves. God hates and has to punish sin, and some day all sin will be destroyed.

“The good news is that God has addressed human corruption from outside the system, and it is on this gracious initiative that Christian hope centers.” (Plantinga pg. 68)

**Other Scriptures to Keep in Mind:**

- Genesis 3:12-13
- Psalm 14:1,3
- Jeremiah 2:27
- Romans 1:21
- Romans 7:15
- Romans 8:20