Priority Systems

A Christ-centered Look at Personality and Culture

Gary T. Waldecker

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Acknowledgements

In this monograph I make extensive use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, also called the MBTI, both of which are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., Palo Alto, California.

Although I disagree with him on many points, I have also made use of the work of Carl Jung, especially the 1971 edition of his book *Psychological Types* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), originallly published in 1923. The MBTI is based on this work by Jung.

See other acknowledgements in the footnotes.
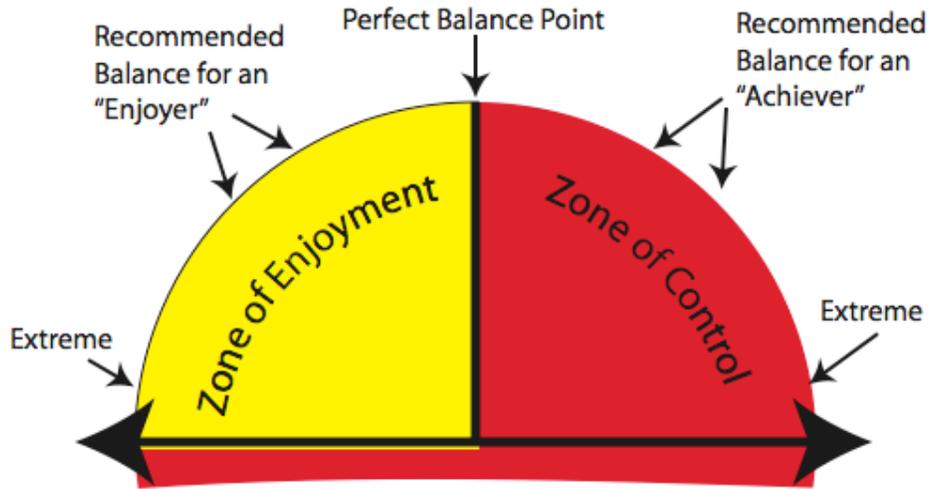

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Prologue: Executive Summary

In any given situation it is impossible not to give priority to some things over others, simply because we are incapable of doing everything at once. Whether the situation is "preaching the whole counsel of God," or simply greeting someone, you have to start somewhere. Do you start preaching in Genesis? Or would Matthew better? Do you hug someone to indicate the spirit with which you enter into conversation, or does a possible hug depend on how the conversation develops?

It is very often the case that the needs and characteristics of the situation will partially determine what things take priority. There is another factor, however, that is often key in deciding what things take priority. People, organizations, and cultures tend to develop habits of giving priority to some things over others, usually based on their abilities and gifts. This habitual tendency in the face of differing situations I call a priority system.

Personality is a priority system for the individual person. I have observed that most Christians deal with personality differences pretty much the same way non-Christians do. For Carl Jung, for example, the solution to personality clashes is summed up in the word "balance." The MBTI, following the lead of Jung, also proposes a kind of balance as the solution. For example, if you are too control oriented, you need to back off on control behaviors and learn to balance it out with some enjoyment or learning behaviors.

The MBTI doesn't recommend a perfect balance, because then the goal would be for everyone to be the same. But they suggest moving away from the "extremes" and *toward* a more balanced position. The diagram below represents the spirit of how most people deal with personality clashes.

Recommended Balance for an "Enjoyer"

Perfect Balance Point

Recommended Balance for an "Achiever"

Zone of Enjoyment

Zone of Control

Extreme

Extreme

There are several problems with this perspective on personality. In the first place, it is unable to pull apart the negative and positive aspects of personality characteristics. In order to lessen the negative you also have to lessen the positive. You have to back off on what you are good at—deny your giftedness to some extent—in order to get along with others. As you move toward the mean between the extremes you become mediocre.

In the second place, it is not clear within this balance perspective how the Bible or a Christ-centered worldview affects personality. Usually the assumption is that social science helps you deal with personality through the mechanism of balance. Then you add Christian piety to what you have through science. In other words, Christ really has nothing to do with how we understand and deal with personality. As far as I know, my approach to personality is unique. How so? In that it views personality from a Christ-centered worldview. I *apply* the gospel to it, instead of *adding* the gospel to it.

I do this in the first place by proposing that personality is a reflection of God's glory, and that different personality "types" tend to give priority to certain aspects of God's glory. This prioritization, I believe, is not in itself sinful. Rather, it comes from being created in

God's image and provides for legitimate diversity among people. If everyone were the same we couldn't learn from each other. It's a matter of giftedness.

Secondly, sin affects personality in that we tend to make an idol out of what we are good at. If our personality gives priority to achievement because we are good at it, sin encourages us to find our worth in our ability to get things done. If we give priority to the enjoyment of life because we are good at it, sin encourages us to find our worth in our ability to find enjoyment. These are both idols, and as such they are substitutes for Christ. Idolatry pushes us to use our personality giftedness as a priority no matter what the situation calls for. We have an internal need to use it because our sense of worth is wrapped up in it. It also keeps us from appreciating other gifts.

The solution, then, is not balance, but dealing with idolatry through the gospel. Backing off on control behaviors doesn't deal with the heart where the idolatry resides. Understanding the idolatry and beginning to deal with it so that we increasingly find our worth in Christ is the way to deal with personality issues. This frees us up to use our personality to bless others instead of being driven by the idolatrous need to use it.

In this document I also touch on how my creation-fall-gospel perspective on personality affects communication, how we confuse our personality priorities with the fruit of the Spirit, and how the "flesh" relates to our personality. With regard to the latter, we will probably have to struggle against the tendency to depend on our personality strengths until Christ comes, although we can make significant progress as we look to Christ. I discuss what it means to have a good conscience in this regard, and how the direction we are heading is more important than exactly where we are.

I also touch on the implications of priority systems for working cross-culturally, and for organizations. This whole area needs to be developed further, and is what I'm presently working on.

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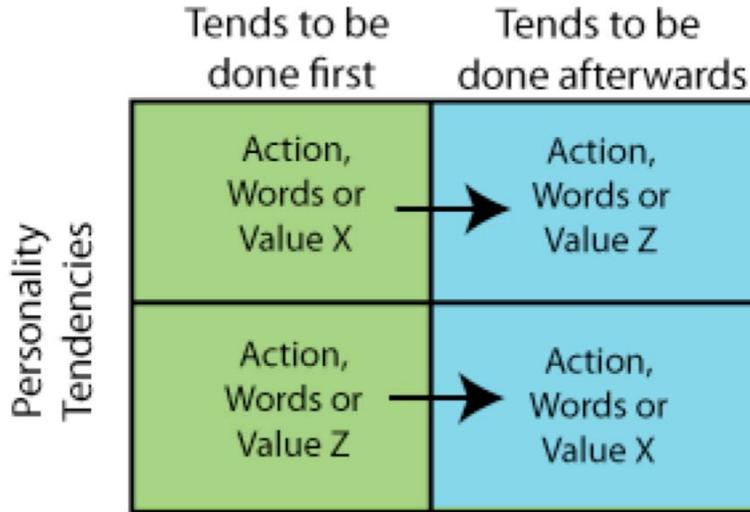
1.0 The Idea of Priority Systems

God made us in such a way that, unlike him, we are unable to do everything at once. Within God's plan, even he doesn't necessarily do everything at once. He carries forward his plan one step at a time and has certain priorities in the process. For example, before he reveals his grace to Abraham, he shows his judgment on sin in the flood. Before he reveals the requirements of his law to his people, he first forms a personal relationship with Abraham and calls him his friend. Before he reaches out to the whole human race, he calls one man and through him forms a nation. Although grace was present in the Old Testament, it is called the time of the Law; and while the law is present in the New Testament, it is called the time of grace.[1]

For Christians, our main priority is to love God with our whole heart, and the second is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Within this framework, however, there is a lot of flexibility as to just how we go about fulfilling our primary priorities. People have different cultural perspectives, family traditions, gifts, abilities and personalities. No one can do everything. So different people often go about loving God and their neighbor in different ways. They have different priorities within their commitment to love God and neighbor.

Priorities are often seen in what people do, what they say, and what they value. Since we can't do or say or express everything at once, we have to decide what things will come first. For the most part,[2] this is how "giving priority" to something is expressed. What is prioritized comes first. It is the starting point. This doesn't mean that other actions, words or values are always or necessarily left out, but that when they are included, they occupy a secondary role. The following diagram illustrates this idea.

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[1] John 1:17
[2] But not always

	Tends to be done first	Tends to be done afterwards
Personality Tendencies	Action, Words or Value X	Action, Words or Value Z
	Action, Words or Value Z	Action, Words or Value X

For example, let's say that X in the diagram is "expressing what you find wrong with someone's work," while Z is "expressing what you find good with someone's work." Some people tend to do X before they do Z, while others tend to do Z before X. In short, there are many different legitimate priorities and starting points within the Biblical framework of loving God and neighbor.[3]

When certain priorities become habitual—when we regularly tend to put certain things before others, we have a priority *system*. There are certain regular tendencies that can be observed. As a simple example, people who are right-handed have a customary tendency to give priority to the use of their right hand. They do make extensive use of their left hand, but the right hand is given priority in many or most situations.

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[3] An activity I often have people do in personality seminars is the following: Blindfold someone and bring them into a room in which obstacles have been arranged. Have someone give the blindfolded person verbal instructions (like "one step forward," "turn 45 degrees to the right," etc.) so that he or she is guided from one side of the obstacle course to the other without touching any of the obstacles. Have someone else write down the instructions as they are given. Then bring in a second person (who has not seen the obstacles course). Tell them what has happened, and that you will read them the same instructions that (hopefully) guided the first person through the obstacle course. But this time you place the person in a different starting point. Obviously the instructions don't work, because the starting point is different.

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Priority systems exist at different levels. There is the individual priority system that we call someone's "personality." Organizations have priority systems that we often call "corporate culture." Nations have priority systems that we call their "culture." .

2.0 Priority Systems and Longings for Glory

How can we describe the kinds of things to which people give priority? They can be as simple as habitual *actions*, such as using one's right hand more often or more skillfully than one's left hand. They can also be *words*. No one can say everything at once. What kinds of things do people tend to say first? Priorities can also be *values*. For example, some people tend to habitually give priority to the value of achievement over the value of enjoyment. While actions, words and values enter into my description of priority systems, I prefer to explain them in terms of what I have called *longings for glory*.[4] I will explain what I mean by this shortly. My point now is that humans have many different longings for glory, and that different people, organizations or cultures habitually give priority to certain longings over others.

Before I give examples of longings for glory, let me first explain what I mean theologically. We have longings for glory because of the way God has designed history. The idea is that in God's plan, history is designed to be a movement from the glory of creation to the greater glory of eschatology. I have called this aspect of God's plan the *upward movement* since it involves moving to a *higher* level of life. This movement from glory to greater glory occurs primarily in three areas. First, there is a movement from the glory of the

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[4] This monograph is part of a longer document, but for the most part is a self-contained unit. It has been modified slightly from the original. See my book *Toward a Theology of Movement: Missiology from a Christ-Centered Kingdom Perspective*, © 1986-2003.

Garden to the greater glory of the City—the New Jerusalem, which is located on the new earth.[5] It was never part of God's plan that mankind remain forever in Eden.[6]

In the second place, there is a movement from the glory of the natural body with which God created mankind in his image to the greater glory of the "spiritual body."[7] Even before the fall Adam and Eve did not yet have their glorified bodies. God was with them in the Garden of Eden, but the Spirit of God did not yet indwell them.

In the third place, there is a movement from the glory of local knowledge and authority to the greater glory of universal knowledge and authority. Apparently Eden was located on a mount.[8] Elevated places in Scripture seem to indicate an authoritative position.[9] When David ruled from Mount Zion, he was in a place of authority. Greater, however, was the authority received by Christ because of his resurrection and ascension into heaven[10]—in a sense the highest elevated position of all.[11] Christ's ascension into heaven with all authority is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 2:2 according to which the mountain of the Lord's temple would one day be elevated. So there is a kind of upward movement in Scripture from the glory of the mount to the greater glory of the "elevated mountain." This means a movement from local authority and knowledge to universal authority and knowledge. The following diagram illustrates the three aspects of the upward movement.

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[5] Revelation 21-22

[6] Or you might say that Eden would become the New City. See my monograph *Toward a Theology of Movement* for the biblical basis for this statement.

[7] 1 Corinthians 15:44-48. The spiritual body is not a spirit, but a Spirit-controlled body. We don't know much about what these "spiritual bodies" will be like. Apparently, however, our new bodies will be so dependent on the indwelling Spirit—of which we now have the down payment—that we will not need to sleep (there will be no night in the new earth). Nor will we be dependent on the energy of the sun (there will be no need of the sun in the new earth because Jesus will be the light). These seem to imply major changes in the ways the laws of physics presently work.

[8] According to Genesis 2:10, the river that watered the Garden began in Eden. So Eden must have been at least an elevated spot. See also Ezekiel 28:13-16, a somewhat obscure passage, but apparently indicating that Eden was on a mount.

[9] See my book *Toward a Theology of Movement* for a more developed argument in this regard.

[10] Matthew 28:18 "All authority is given to me…"

[11] Compare Psalm 68:15-18 with Isaiah 2:2 and Ephesians 4:7-10, which quotes Psalm 68. When David ascended Mount Zion, it was a foreshadowing of Jesus' greater ascension into heaven.
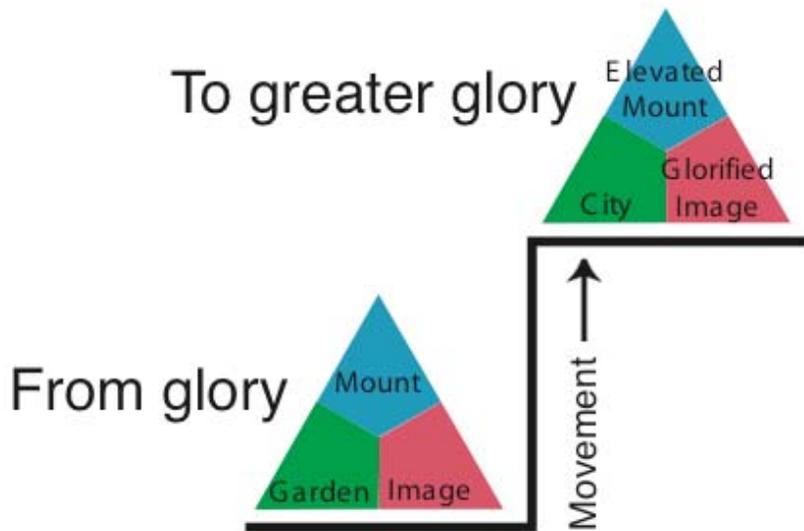
Even before the fall, then, there was a hope of greater glory held out to humanity. This hope was symbolized by the Tree of Life. God had already breathed into them the breath of life so that each became a "living being."[12] The Tree of Life, then, held out to them a promise of a higher kind of life—the life of the greater glory to come.

Because mankind and history are designed in this way—because we were created at one level of glory with the possibility of reaching a higher level, we all have longings for glory. We long for love, for romance and intimacy, for friendship, fellowship and worship. We long for power, control, wealth, and achievement. We long for wisdom, knowledge and authority. Unfortunately, it is commonly believed that the essence of Christianity is to stamp out these longings. I believe, on the other hand, that these longings are legitimate and reflective of God's glory, but have been twisted by sin. Redemption does not get rid of them, but deals with the self-centeredness that became entwined with them as a result of the fall. Our longings are fulfilled as we stop focusing on them because we are overwhelmed by the

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[12] Genesis 2:7

glory of God in Christ. The more we gaze into his glorious face, the more we reflect his glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). It is "Christ in you" that is "the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).[13]

3.0 Priority Systems and Revelation

A given priority system includes a multitude of factors, including actions and values. However, I would like to suggest that the most basic priority issues every person and culture has to deal with are related to God's revelation.[14] I further suggest that the longings for glory we experience are related to this revelation.

I believe that God's revelation is tri-fold. He has revealed himself in three primary ways: through his mouth, through his hand, and through his name. In other words, he has revealed himself through the *words he says*, through the *works he does*, and through the *character* implied in *who he is*. The Bible indicates that the words of his mouth are faithful and authoritative, that the works of his hands are righteous and backed up by a powerful arm, and that the character revealed by his name is loving, holy and glorious.[15]

His authoritative words we hear in Scripture. His words come in these forms: promise, testimony and law. [16]

God's Words

Promise   Testimony   Law

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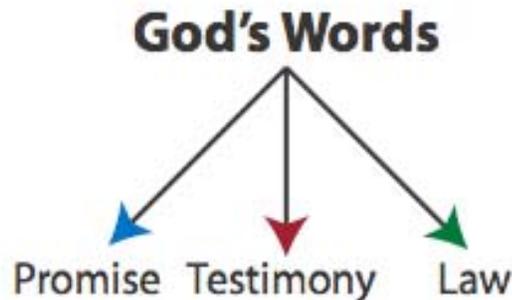
[13] For a more thorough discussion of this issue, see my article "Of Stories and Heroes."

[14] That is, within the ultimate priority frameworks of trust in God vs. trust in self. At this point I am not referring to the most basic priority decision that has to do with one's ultimate allegiance.

[15] For a fuller description of this revelation see my book *Toward a Theology of Movement*.

[16] We could also include direct commands, as when God says, "Let there be light."

His works we see in history. For example, he brought his people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The death and resurrection of Jesus are prime examples of his mighty works. His character we experience through his presence with us. The Bible speaks of this as a face-to-face relationship. For example, God's people often ask him not to hide his face, but to let the light of his face shine on them.[17] The coming of the Holy Spirit is the clearest example of this aspect of revelation.

The revelation of God's words in Scripture, of his mighty works in history, and of his presence with his people have been called God's *special* revelation. They are God's special interventions related to his plan for saving his people and bringing them to glory. However, there is also a revelation of God's words, works and character embedded in the world he has created. We refer to this as God's *general* revelation.
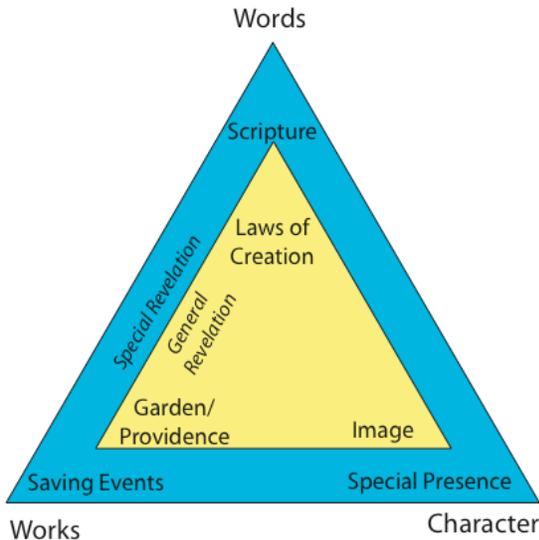

For example, in creation we find laws (like the law of gravity or the laws of logic) that reflect the faithfulness of God's words. Laws can be of the kind that tell us what we

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[17] Psalm 4:6, 27:8, 31:16, 44:3, 67:1, 80:3, 105:4, 119:135.

should do, or they can be of the kind that give meaning to some observations.[18] We also find

his works of creation and providence (like making the world and the Garden, or like feeding

the birds of the air and clothing the lilies of the field) that parallel his special works of

redemption. We also find that God has made himself present in creation by the fact that

everything reflects his glory. Especially important in this regard is the way mankind reflects

God's glory as the image of God.

These three areas of revelation are fulfilled in Christ in his offices of prophet, king

and priest. As our prophet, he speaks God's words. As our king, he works to bring about the

goal of history--he brings in God's kingdom. As our priest, he brings us into God's presence

where we become more like him (that is, we reflect his character in a greater way).
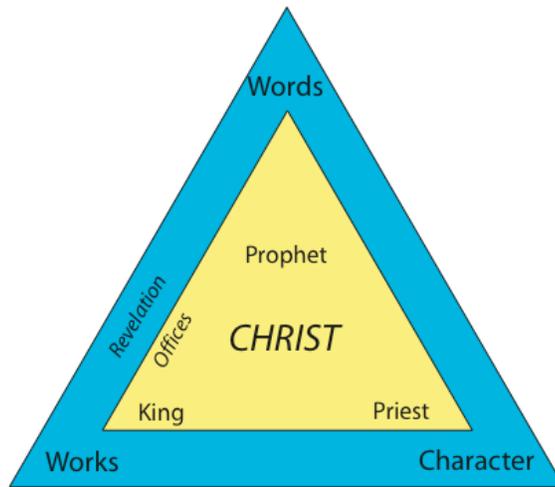
This tri-fold revelation[19] is reflected in the three most basic questions that have

engaged philosophers for years: *what is there?* (metaphysics or ontology), *how do we know?*

(epistemology) and *how do we decide what to do*? (ethics). As Christians, we believe that an

adequate answer to these questions requires us to take into account both God's supernatural

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[18] The law of gravity doesn't tell us what to do, but explains the regularity of our experience of things falling when dropped.

[19] John M. Frame's tri-perspectivalism has contributed to and supported my thinking is this regard. See, for example, *Perspectives on the Word of God: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1990.

revelation as well as his revelation in creation. Non-Christian philosophies typically take into account only what we would call God's revelation of himself in creation—and they do this only because they have no choice. God has surrounded us with revelation of himself and we can't escape it.
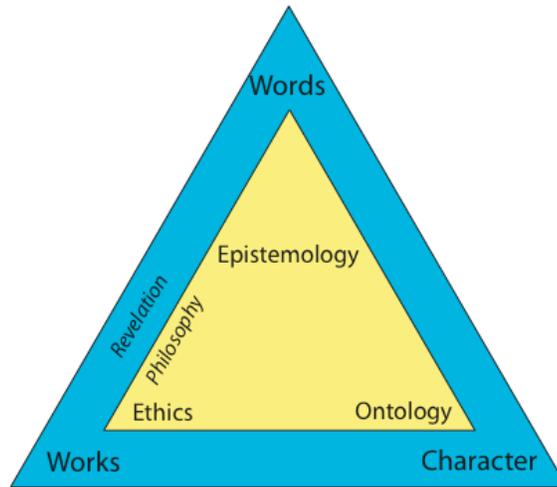
I suggest that our longings for glory tend to cluster in these three areas: longings for glory related to knowing (e.g. knowledge, wisdom, authority), longings related to doing (e.g. power, control, riches, achievement), and longings related to being (e.g. romance, intimacy, love, harmonious relationships, friendship, worship). In what follows we will examine these three main areas of revelation—knowing, doing and being—and how they affect priority systems.

4.0 The Environment of Priority Systems: Knowing, Doing and Being

Quoting an unbelieving poet, Paul says in Acts 17:28 that "In him [God] we live and move and have our being." We might say that God—and his revelation—is the environment in which we live. Because God has revealed himself through words, works and character, we live within an atmosphere of knowing, doing and being. We cannot escape this environment, though as we shall see later, we can distort it through sin. Because we live in God's world,

we have longings for glory related to knowing, to doing and to being. These are the primary factors that affect priority systems. Some people give priority to knowing, some to doing and some to being. Furthermore, as we will see in the next sections, priority systems are more complex than this simple three-fold difference. We will find there are two tendencies related to knowing, two related to doing, and two related to being.
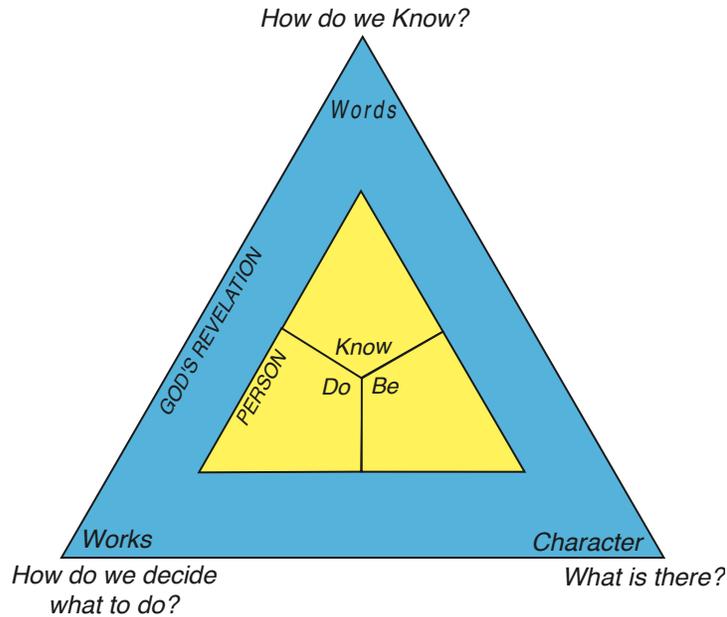
4.1 How do we know?

To the question "How do we know?" most non-Christian philosophies will center the issue on what we would call "the Garden" and "the Image." That is, they focus on the object of knowledge (the external world) and on the subject of knowledge[20] (the mind of the one who does the knowing).[21] Do we know and understand by relating to God's revelation of

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[20] The word "subject" here does not mean "topic." Rather, it refers to the one who does the knowing as opposed to the object known.

[21] Kant said that we cannot know anything about the external world as it really is. We can only know it as we experience it. Imagine for a moment a custard cup that is able to think. (See John Sanderson's book, *Encounter in the Non-Christian Era*.) The custard cup can't know anything about the custard while it is still cooking on the stove, but only after it is poured into the cup. Because of this, no matter what the flavor of custard, there is something each one has in common: the shape. Each batch of custard takes the shape of the cup. This is something the "knower" contributes to the knowing experience. So the custard cup can't know the custard as it really is, but only as it experiences it. The external world is like shapeless pudding that is given form only by our

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himself in the external world (the heavens declare the glory of God), or by relating to his revelation of himself that is within us as the image of God (the law of God is written on our hearts)? Obviously we need to relate to both, and we need to do so in the light of God's special revelation.

How do we know?

Garden — Object of knowledge
Image — Subject of knowledge
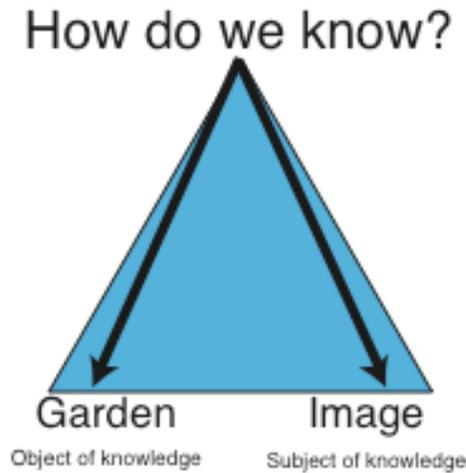
However, I would like to suggest that it is legitimate to "lead out" with one or the other. In fact, I believe it is often more productive to lead out with one or the other than to attempt an equal balance between the two. Leading out with one allows you to focus on it and become good at it. Most cultures and personalities tend to lead out with one or the other, and this is part of their basic priority system.

Those who try to understand something by relating first of all to the external world of things and people[22] are popularly called "extraverts."[23] The popular shorthand for

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minds. Although I disagree with Kant on biblical grounds, I also believe it's true that the knower contributes something to the knowing experience. God reveals himself both in the external world as well as in the internal world.

[22] From one perspective "people" belong to the "being" corner of the triangle in that they are like God as his image. From another perspective, however, they are part of what one senses as being outside of oneself and part of the outside world.

[23] I thoroughly disagree with Carl G. Jung's unbiblical and even anti-biblical worldview. The philosophy that ties together his view of personality types (see his *Psychological Types*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1971) is not biblical. He eliminates the distinction between Creator and creature by saying God is a projection of the psyche. Within the psyche (and therefore within God) there are irreconcilable opposites,

extraversion is the letter E. Those who try to understand something by relating first of all to

the internal world of one's own mind are popularly called "introverts." The popular

shorthand for introversion is the letter I.[24] Following is a list of some of the typical

characteristics of these two priority systems:

Extraverts	Introverts
Gather information from the external world quickly	Gather information from the internal world quickly
To understand something, they want to know first of all what other people think or have done	To understand something, they first of all take into account what they themselves think about it.
Value relating to other people because this is how they initially come to understand a situation	Value time alone to reflect because this is how they initially come to understand a situation
Because of this preference for understanding, they will frequently take the initiative to make contact with others	Because of this preference for understanding, they will frequently take the initiative to be alone and reflect.
Value breadth of knowledge, assuming this will lead to depth.	Value depth of knowledge, assuming this will lead to breadth.
Often speak or act before much serious reflection	Often take time to reflect before speaking or acting
Often think out loud, thus sharing with others their process of coming to conclusions. Come to conclusions by thinking out loud with others.	The thinking process is often done internally, and only the conclusions are shared with others. Want to know their conclusions before sharing with others.
Because they tend to think out loud, they also tend to say what they are thinking spontaneously. Because they are in process, they may not really mean it (not a conclusion).	Often very discreet and cautious with the information they share with others.
Often don't mind interruptions and interrupting others, because it's all part of the process of interacting with the external world	Don't like being interrupted or interrupting others because they assume when people speak they are giving their conclusions.
Often feel uncomfortable with silences and pauses in the conversation because the important process has stopped. Often finish the phrases of others.	Often want silence in order to reflect, or want others to be quiet and listen to their conclusions.
Often seem enthusiastic and animated because of their constant interaction with the external world.	Often seem calm and reserved because of their constant interaction with the internal world.
Often assume that if you don't say anything, you are agreeing with them.	Often assume that if you don't say anything, you are thinking about it.

including these personality differences. A Christian worldview sees these personality differences as reflections of different aspects of God's glory that come together harmoniously within himself. Because Jung rejects God and his special revelation, he ends up relying on the "balance" of polar opposites to tie things together. In addition, I think he gives too much importance to the unconscious. He obviously doesn't take into account the effects of sin on different personalities. In my opinion he also confuses introversion and intuition in some ways. However, even though I disagree with his underlying interpretations, I believe he described some important categories that are involved in personality and cultural differences. So while I will use some of his terminology, this does not mean agreement with his worldview of fundamental interpretation of types. For Jung these categories do apply to cultures as well as to personalities.

[24] Although Carl Jung sometimes associates Extraversion and Introversion with knowing, this is not his emphasis. Rather, he refers to them as sources of energy. I disagree with his focus at this point.

The specific ways these two priority systems are expressed can vary from culture to culture. However, the above descriptions will give a general idea of the basic differences. Later we will see how sin can affect these priority systems, but now I want to make the point that it is legitimate and even helpful to have different priority systems with different starting points. If there were no differences in this regard, for example, our breadth of knowledge wouldn't be very broad and our depth of knowledge wouldn't be very deep. The differences allow us to specialize and to help one another.

4.2 What should we do?

A second set of factors that affects our priority systems has to do with how we decide what is important and what we should do. The primary aspects of God's creational revelation that come into play here are as follows:

1. The authority of the law aspect of God's Word as expressed in created laws like logic

2. The love and presence-in-relationship that reflect God's character and presence.
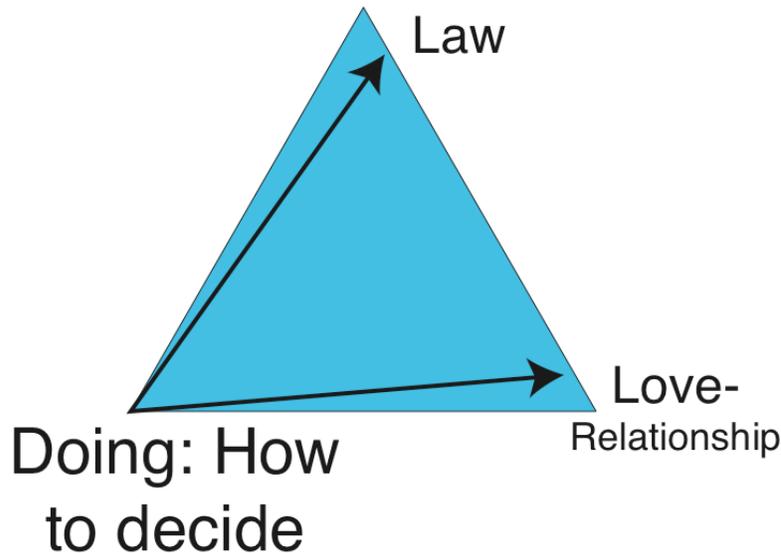
Using the terminology of Carl Jung and the popular Myers-Briggs personality indicator that is based on his typology, those who make their initial decisions and value

judgments based on logical and principial considerations are called "Thinkers." The popular shorthand for this preference is the letter T. Those who make initial decisions and value judgments based on what is loving and promotes the personal relationship, are called "Feelers." The popular shorthand for this preference is the letter F. As many admit, these are unfortunate terms because they might seem to imply that some people are unthinking and others are unfeeling.[25] The difference between the two is a matter of priority—usually a matter of which gets done first. The person who prefers T usually begins with truth considerations, and then may take into account relational concerns. The person who prefers F starts with relational considerations and then may take into account truth-related concerns.

The T preference begins with an "objective" decision. That is, you don't let your personal involvement override the logic or truth of the situation. The F preference, on the other hand, begins with a "subjective" decision. That is, your personal presence and love for the person become the guiding factors in making a decision. Following is a list of some of the typical characteristics of these two priority systems:

Thinking	Feeling
Tend to make initial decisions based on logic, principles, truth.	Tend to make initial decisions based on character and relational considerations like love and harmony.
Seek objectivity	Seek to identify with others
Tend to be direct. The best way to love someone is to tell them the truth and be up front about it.	Tend to affirm the relationship before communicating a truth. The best way to tell someone the truth is within the bonds of a trusting relationship.
Tend to enjoy discussing or arguing a point.	Tend to avoid arguments, conflict and confrontation whenever possible.
Good at finding what is wrong with something. Do this spontaneously before expressing appreciation.	Good at finding what is right with something. Do this spontaneously before expressing criticism.
Good at analyzing plans, situations and people.	Good at identifying with and understanding people, and knowing how the people factor affects plans and situations.

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[25] It also reduces being to feeling, although many MBTI practitioners are careful to say that "feeling" doesn't mean simply "guided by emotions."

4.3 What is there?

A third set of factors has to do with the question "What is there?" When we observe something, what aspects of it do we tend to focus on? What do we perceive when we observe? The primary aspects of God's creational revelation in this case are:

1. The present reality—especially the Garden.

2. The meaning of the present reality and the future possibilities. From a biblical point of view, the meaning of something can't be separated from its future. The full meaning of the Garden, for example, only becomes clear in the coming of the City. The full meaning of one's life only becomes clear at the end when one receives his or her new name from God. This priority focuses on the testimonial and promise aspects of God's Word. What is the meaning of what we observe and how does that relate to what could and will be—particularly the City, but including the Glorified Image and the elevated Mountain.
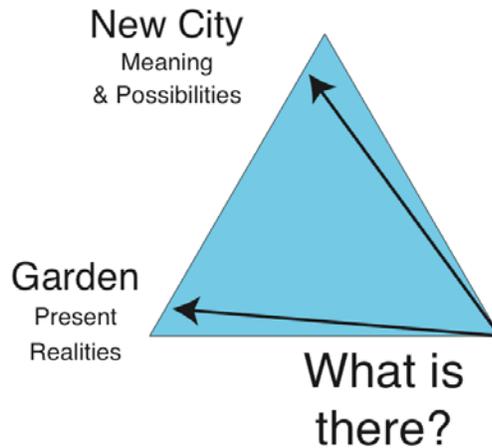
The first includes a focus on concrete realities—like "Rover" or "Fido," while the second includes a focus on abstract concepts like "dog."[26] That is, what is the essence of

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[26] For instance, what is the "dogness" that applies to all specific dogs? According to Plato, the idea of "dogness" would be more real than any specific dog. Later the Realist philosophers tended to agree with Plato while the Nominalists said that abstract nouns are just convenient ways of grouping instances of particulars.

being a dog? Furthermore, the first tends to use more literal language, while the second tends to use more figurative language. [27] The first focuses on present realities, while the second gives priority to future possibilities.

Those who tend to focus first on the present realities are popularly called "sensing," represented by the letter S. Those who tend to focus first on the meaning and the future possibilities are called "intuitive," represented by the letter N. The Sensing preference focuses on what can be observed with the five senses. The N preference focuses on the meaning of what can be observed and on what could be if we rearranged things or did something different. The following is a list of some typical differences between these aspects of a priority system:

Sensing	Intuitive
Tend to focus first on the rich and concrete detail of what can be observed with the five senses while putting the meaning into the background.	Tend to focus first on the meaning of a situation while putting the sensory data into the background.
Focus first on the parts and pieces in order to discern the total design.	Focus on the total design to find out how the parts and pieces fit.
Tend to be realistic and practical.	Tend to be imaginative and dreamers.
Focus first on "how to."	Focus first on "where are we going?"
Initially trust experience more than theories and concepts.	Initially trust more in concepts than experience.
Often prefer linear learning—step by step.	Often prefer to learn by observing patterns and relationships, which isn't usually linear but "divergent".
Like to solve problems with what has always worked. "Let's not reinvent the wheel."	Like to solve problems by innovating. "What kind of a wheel would work best on this terrain—or maybe a hovercraft would work better."
A vision for the future should be based squarely on an examination of the present reality, which comes first.	The details can be worked out once you have your vision for the future clear.

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[27] Literal language tries to focus on the uniqueness of each "thing" while figurative language explores unusual relationships between things and the similarities they may have with one another. For example, Jesus said that Herod was a fox. Herod was not "literally" a fox, but Jesus was drawing attention to the similarities between the two. Figurative language has its basis in the fact that God made man in his image (like him) and the whole of creation is a reflection of his glory. Man in particular, and creation in general, are similes and metaphors of God. Literal language helps us focus on the uniqueness of each aspect of creation, while figurative language helps us see how things could be related to each other.

4.4 Knowing, Doing and Being

The basic elements of a priority system, then, involve the following three pairs of categories:

Knowing		Doing		Being	
Object	Subject	Law	Love	Reality	Possibility
E	I	T	F	S	N
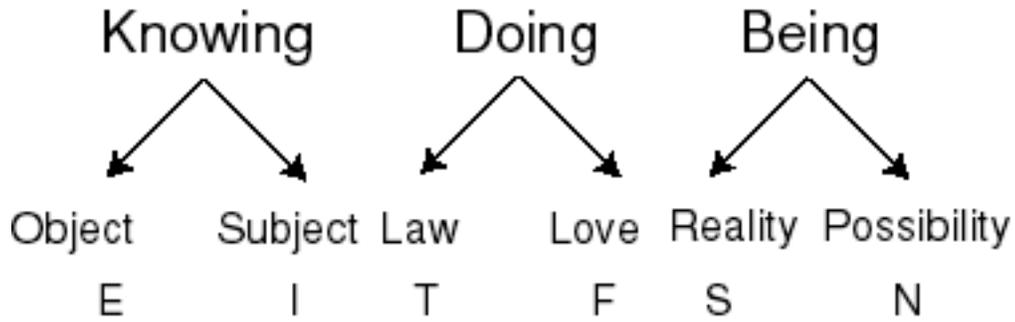
Within a biblical perspective, the members of each pair are not opposed to each other, but complement one another. The wider revelation of God in word, deed and character, with its fulfillment in Christ, provides the necessary framework within which these pairs fit together and have meaning. For example, Adam might dream of the City of the future, but he would never get there unless he interpreted the present reality in light of God's Word.

Another aspect of a priority system has to do with which of the three major areas—knowing, doing or being—is given preference.[28]

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[28] Carl Jung does not emphasize Extraversion and Introversion as ways of knowing. Furthermore, he does not call them mental functions, as he does sensing, intuition, thinking and feeling. Rather, he calls them "orientations."
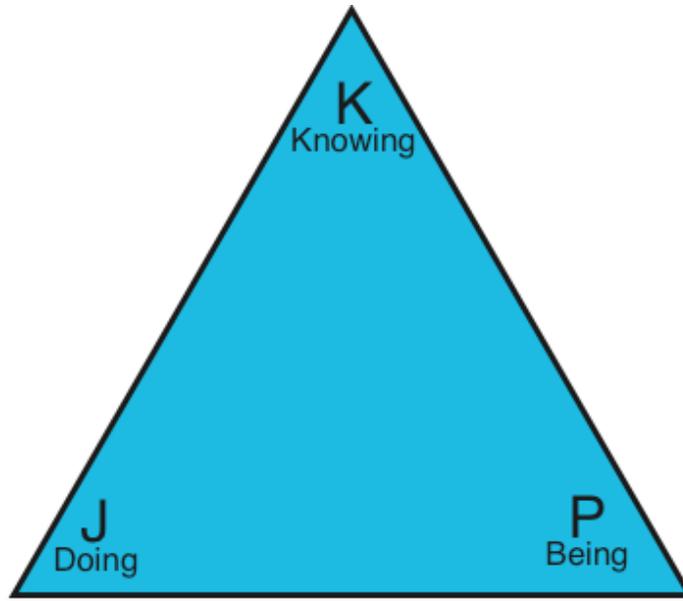
Within the theory of Myers-Briggs, those who give priority to "doing" are classified as people of "judgment." They like to make judgments or decisions about what should be done. They emphasize acting upon the world rather than adapting to it. They decide what to do on a minimum of information (priority over "knowing"), and feel compelled to finish their work before they play, rest or enjoy something other than work (priority over "being"). The shorthand for this preference is the letter J.

Those who give priority to "being" are called "perceivers". For these people, adapting to and enjoying what is or what could be is more important than accomplishing something (priority over "doing") or understanding it (priority over "knowing"). This preference is represented by the letter P.

Jung and Myers-Briggs do not deal with Extraversion and Introversion in the way I have, so they do not talk about a preference that gives priority to "knowing" over "doing" and "being". In my development of personality theory, I add the letter K, which represents those who give priority to "knowing". These people need either more information from the

external world, or a clearer perspective emanating from the internal world before they make a decision (priority over "doing") or before they play or adapt to what is (priority over "being"). Myers-Briggs takes the characteristics that in my view belong to the K priority and puts them with the P characteristics. The following is a list of typical differences between the J, P and K preferences or priorities:

Judging	Perceiving	Knowing
Tend to make decisions on a minimum of information and usually feel committed to those decisions. Usually known as decisive people.	Tend to emphasize observation and to postpone major decisions in the interest of adapting to and/or enjoying the present situation. Often make a series of smaller decisions along the way as they adapt to what is happening around them.	Tend to postpone major decisions in the interest of gathering more data.
Lead out with structuring and controlling their life and world	Lead out with adapting to their world and keeping their options open	Lead out with gathering information about their world and understanding it.
Usually work better when they can plan and follow their plan	Usually work better starting different projects as the need arises	Usually work better when they feel they have a clear understanding of a situation.
Don't like to begin projects unless they can finish them	Tend to begin so many projects that not all of them can be finished	Postpone projects until they have enough information.
Usually think that working is fun.	Usually focus on enjoyment and try to find ways to make work more enjoyable.	Understanding a situation is fun.
Usually meet deadlines.	If they meet the deadline it's often at the last minute with the help of adrenaline, because they are busy adapting to their world instead of controlling it.	Tend to postpone deadlines in the interest of gathering more information.
It's easier to relax after work is done.	It's easier to work when time is taken to play.	It's easier to work or play when you first have understanding and enough information.
Goal oriented	Process oriented	Information Oriented

These nine characteristics (E, I, S, N, T, F, J, P, K) are the primary elements that go into making up the basic priority system of an individual, a corporation or a culture. Whether or not the priority system involves *conscious* priority decisions, everyone has to deal with these issues that relate to God's revelation of himself.

5.0 Levels of Priority Systems

Furthermore, everyone has to deal with priority systems on different levels. One's personal priority system is affected by that of his or her culture, parents or workplace. If one's personal priority system is different from that of the dominant national culture, one will often feel unaccepted or out of place. Some in this situation join a counter culture movement, while others try their best to conform to the expectations of society, sometimes to their own detriment. If the culture is structured in a way that gives priority to one value, then people who personally prefer the complementary value are often viewed as immature. For example, I suggest that the culture of the United States prefers Extraversion to Introversion. This cultural preference involves more than the fact that, according to various studies, there are more extraverts in the US than introverts. It means that most of our customs and traditions—and even many institutions—are organized around the value of extraversion. As a result, those who prefer introversion are often viewed a less developed or immature. The word "shy"—a word that in our culture usually has negative connotations—is often applied to them.

The same kind of dynamic can happen within a family when the parents do not accept the priority system of the children. It can also be frustrating when the priority system where one works is different from one's own personal priority system. Which priority system will take priority? To be accurate we may have to talk about a priority system of priority systems! All these levels of priorities are affected by one's ultimate priority system: commitment to God through grace or commitment to self as a result of the fall.
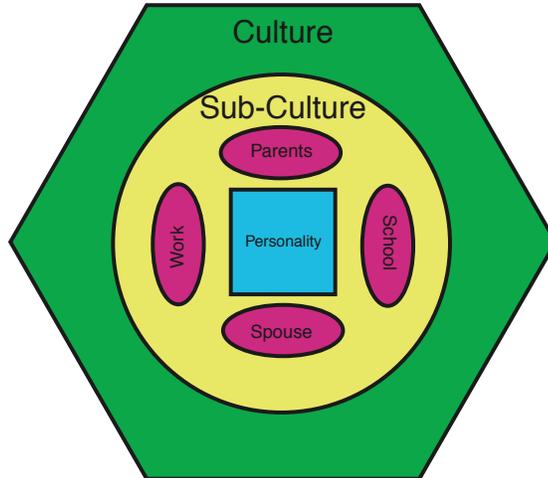
6.0 Effects of the Fall on Priority Systems

6.1 Introduction

God had promised that if Adam and Eve did their work in submission to God's authority by not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then they would experience the life symbolized in the tree of life. In other words, they would experience the upward movement.[29] Even though the second law of thermodynamics (the so called law of entropy)[30] was operative before the fall, God's power operating through Adam and Eve was designed to overcome that tendency toward disorder. It's as if God had planted seeds of glory (mankind) within creation that, being watered by his presence, would not only overcome entropy, but would bring about the upward movement.

The fall can be seen as an attempt by mankind to become more like God—to experience the upward movement—without submitting to God or experiencing his presence. Adam and Eve were already like God, because they were made in his image. Satan's temptation was that they could become more like God—especially in the area of knowledge

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[29] See page 13.
[30] According to which everything tends toward greater disorder within a closed system.

and wisdom—if they would eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In other words, "You can become more like God—experience the upward movement in the area of knowledge—without submitting to God's authority."[31]

Because of the fall, God's judgment fell upon mankind and the creation. One way to understand this judgment is that God would no longer be "watering" the seeds of glory planted in the creation, with the result that entropy would take over. Instead of man ruling over creation and being instrumental in effecting the upward movement, now entropy would rule and man return to the dust from which he was taken.[32] Not only was there be a lack of watering, but the seeds themselves became corrupted. The judgment affected all three areas of God's revelation in creation that contained within them the seeds of glory: man's work in the garden,[33] the procreation that is related to the "being" corner of the triangle,[34] and the authority structure.[35] As a result of the fall, then, there was no longer any hope of glory held out to mankind. The upward movement would be prevented by the judgment that must fall.

On the other hand, God promised that Adam and Eve would have children, and that one of them would destroy Satan.[36] Somehow, even in the midst of judgment, there was hope for those who believed this word of promise. God would somehow continue to work through them as the image of God to bring about the upward movement.

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[31] Genesis 3:5 "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

[32] Genesis 3:19 ". . . until you return from the ground from which you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

[33] Genesis 3:17-19

[34] Genesis 3:16a

[35] A good case can be made for seeing in the woman's "desire" of Genesis 3:16b an attempt to usurp her husband's authority over her. The husband, on the other hand, responds with dominating authority.

[36] Genesis 3:15 "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." More on this later.

6.2 The Image of God vs. Idols

Scripture makes a contrast between being the image of God and making images of God. In Deuteronomy 4:12-15 Moses says to the people:

> Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. . . . You saw no form of any kind. . . . Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape. . . .

God forbade the making of images [37] because they teach error. People would imagine God to be like their image of him, and would stop listening to his Word. As a consequence they would do damage to themselves. A psalmist describes the process this way:

> Their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. Psalm 115:4-8

According to this passage, a person eventually becomes like his image of God.[38] A person becomes like what he worships and trusts in for fulfillment. If that image does not reflect the true God—for example, if it is powerless and ineffective—then neither will its worshipers have any true power. Instead of making images, therefore, we must listen to and obey the Word of God. Then we will be like him and God will still work through his image to bring about the upward movement through the greater Image, Jesus. Instead of making images and idols of God we must be the image of God by obeying his Word.

The point I want to make here is that images and idols are pseudo sources of power to effect the upward movement. They replace God's plan of working through his image to arrive at the goal of history. What are idols? Aspects of creation that reflect God's glory and

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[37]The word for "images" in Hebrew is not the same as the word used in Genesis 1:26-27 to say that man is the "image" of God, but it is a synonym.

[38]Sanderson, Class Lecture Notes, "Doctrine."

which people depend on to bring them fulfillment. Why do people cling to idols? Because they have an inescapable longing for glory.[39] As a result of the fall, then, idols become the focal point of man's search for fulfillment and glory. However, they are also ineffective means of producing fulfillment. Those who trust in them become like them—powerless, corrupt and ignorant.

6.3 Priority Systems as Idols

A man may have many idols, but I would like to suggest that normally his primary idol (or idol complex) is his fundamental priority system. Because of the fall, we tend to make an idol out of our priority system. Because it reflects God's glory it attracts us to the hope of greater glory. We depend on it to find fulfillment. To the extent that our security, strength, significance, or sense of acceptance depends on something in creation, that something functions as an idol. The chart below shows some of the ways this could show itself in the primary areas of knowing, doing and being, as well as in the secondary areas of how we know, do and be:

Primary Areas	Possible Idolization Effects	Secondary Areas	Possible Idolization Effects
Knowing	Intellectualism; need to have authority	Extraversion (E)	Over-dependence on the opinion of the "experts;" talk too much; not enough time to reflect and focus internally
		Introversion (I)	Indifference to others, over-dependence on self; uncommunicative; adversarial stance toward outside world
Doing	Activism; Goal oriented at the expense of commitment to process; Need to have control	Thinking (T)	Insensitivity; overly direct; over dependence on logic; use of logic or truth as a club to get one's way.
		Feeling (F)	Harmony at all cost; hard to say "no"; people pleaser; use of kindness to get one's way.
Being	Experientialism; Process oriented at the expense of commitment to goals; Need to be free	Sensing (S)	Can't see beyond "what is;" pessimistic, stuck in routine
		Intuiting (N)	Dreams for future not based on "what is;" unrealistically optimistic

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[39] However, instead of being content to reflect God's glory as the moon reflects the light of the sun, they now wanted to be the sun.

Much more could be added, but the list gives an idea of how legitimate and useful priority systems can be twisted by sin. When a person idolizes his priority system, he tends to assume that the way he sees things is the only way, or at least the best way, to see things. Of course, when priority systems are idolized, they clash with each other instead of being complementary. Let's look at a few examples.

Imagine a married couple in the midst of a conflict. One leads out with the T preference, while the other leads out with the F preference. To the extent that they have idolized these priorities—to the extent that their sense of worth is bound up with them—the following impasse would not be uncommon. The T says, "Let's talk things out logically so we can get everything clear and then we'll be able to hug and affirm our relationship." Notice how the "truth" value takes priority over the "love" value. This is not wrong in itself. But to the extent that his sense of identity is wrapped up in being right, or in clarifying the issue, he will insist on this priority. It has become idolatrous. The F says, "Let's hug and affirm our relationship so we can see clearly to talk things out." Notice how the "love" value takes priority over the "truth" value. This is not wrong in and of itself. But to the extent that her sense of worth is wrapped up in maintaining harmony, she will insist on this priority. It has become idolatrous. Of course, they don't really say these things, but these are the assumptions—often unconscious—that are driving the dynamics of the attempted process of resolution. To the extent that each insists on his or her priority, there is no good way out of the dilemma.

Now imagine a supervisor who approaches one of his workers with these words. "I'm going to have to let you go because I just can't trust someone who doesn't say what he

thinks." The supervisor is an extravert and the worker an introvert. Of course, if an extravert weren't habitually verbalizing his thought process, it would probably be a sign that something was wrong—maybe even that he or she was hiding something. But for an introvert, this would not be unusual and would certainly not be a sign that he or she couldn't be trusted. The extravert had made extraversion the criterion for trust and was negatively judging the introvert in terms of his own extraverted priority system. Idolization makes one's own priority system the standard from which others are measured, valued and judged.

Think now of two people in the office who are given the task of coming up with a proposal. The extravert wants to talk about it together right away because he comes to an initial understanding of a situation by interacting with others. He also wants to organize a meeting with several experts on the subject, and find out what other organizations are doing. The introvert, on the other hand, feels that he needs to be alone for a while to get his thoughts together on the subject. He wants to have something concrete to share with the other person when they meet. Also, the introvert thinks it's premature to find out what the experts say or what other organizations are doing. In order to avoid undue influence from others, he believes the organization should get clear what it thinks on the subject first. To the extent that they have idolized their respective priority systems, they will be frustrated with each other.

Let's imagine two other people who need to come up with a proposal. One has a sensing priority system and the other has an intuitive one. The intuitive wants to begin with the vision and the possibilities implied in it. The sensing person, while recognizing the importance of the vision, thinks the intuitive person spends way too much time on it. He wants to get to something practical as soon as possible. The intuitive makes some lofty and very conceptual proposals and the sensor, feeling the need to help him be more realistic,

points out how impractical those proposals are. "Have you thought of this detail," he says. The intuitive secretly thinks the sensor is a "bubble burster" and responds in this way, "That's just a detail. We can work that out later." The intuitive, while often taking the present situation into account, is primarily motivated by the possibilities for the future and resolves the question of "details" by continually referring to his vision of the future. The details make sense in light of the overarching vision. The sensor, while often taking the vision into account, is primarily motivated by the reality of the present situation and wants to know what the next concrete step will be. The vision becomes clearer as you see the details. To the extent that these two have idolized their priority systems, they will probably call each other names and not enjoy working together.

Another example: two executives in a company were chosen because of their gifts. The one who leads out with doing (judgment or J) is gifted in organization, management and the ability to deliver the product to the customers on time. The other leads out with being (perception or P) and is known for his flexibility. He is especially good at keeping up with market trends and quickly adjusting to customer needs. The P thinks the J is too organized, wants to control too much, and is trying to impose his order on the P. The J, on the other hand, thinks the P is too flexible and will ruin the company by his tendency to fly by the seat of his pants. There is continual friction between them because each assumes that his own priority system is the more correct. The P depends too much on his ability to flex and observe what's happening and therefore can't appreciate the priority system of the J. The J depends too much on his ability to organize and control and so doesn't appreciate the priority system of the P. To the extent that one's sense of worth is bound up with these priorities, one has a functional idol controlling his or her behavior.

6.4 Priority Systems: Sin vs. "Lack of Balance"

The Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) is being used more and more in churches to help people understand one another better. On the one hand I think this can be a good thing, but on the other I have concerns about how it is being used. My main concern is that it is often presented in the same way that secular organizations present it—without taking into account the effects of sin on different priority systems and the role of Christ.

This typically shows up in the Jungian emphasis on balance. The presentation goes something like this: if you have too much of T you need to balance it by adding a little more F. If your preference for T, for example, leads you to be too direct with people, you need to develop your F and learn to take people into account more. At first glance this may appear to be innocuous enough. I believe, however, that this approach leads people away from the real problem. If I am correct in my position that we all tend to make an idol out of our priority system, then adding a little idolized F to an already idolized T will only (at best) hide the symptoms. This approach has the tendency to produce frustrated people and/or hypocrites. If I go back and forth between being too direct and being a people pleaser, I have not really solved the problem. Balance is not the answer.

A true solution requires that we understand in what ways we are depending on our priority system to find fulfillment in any way: security, power, knowledge, significance, intimacy, etc. As we do, we will be freed up to use our weaker areas of personality in a more natural way. This involves being alert to ways in which we rub people the wrong way and not simply dismissing these incidents by assuming that "they have a problem." Both marriage

and cross-cultural missions provide an excellent training ground in this regard.[40] Also, not avoiding people who rub us the wrong way provides another opportunity for growth in this area.

A true solution also requires, as we shall see, repentance of this dependence on our strengths[41] as well as faith in Christ. In this way we do not change the priority system that gives us our uniqueness. Rather, we free it up to use in a way that complements other priority systems. Let me give an example from my own experience.

My own personality type is the opposite from that of the national preference in Chile. My priority system includes the elements I and T (introversion and thinking), while the Chileans tend to give priority to E and F (extraversion and feeling). When I first came to Chile in 1978 I attended a birthday party at a youth group in a local church. We all had a good time, I thought, but afterwards someone came up to me with a very concerned look and asked, "What's wrong?" I said nothing was wrong and she said, "Then why didn't you say anything during the whole meeting? Everyone thought you were either upset or proud. You were sitting back analyzing everyone and not participating." The "extraverted" expectation is that you will share your thought process out loud. The "feeling" expectation is that you will show people that relationships are a priority for you. If people don't know what you are thinking, and if you don't show a high interest in the relationship, they imagine you are thinking bad things about them or upset about something.

Although I didn't say this, my first reaction was that they had all been talking so much I couldn't get a word in edgewise; and they changed topics so much that when I finally got a chance to say what I wanted to say, they weren't talking about that anymore. What I did

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[40] In both cases you are in a situation in which it is difficult to escape the differences if you care at all about making the marriage work or fulfilling your mission.

[41] One's priority system represents deep strengths.

do was pull out my Bible. I showed her some of my favorite verses in Proverbs—"in many words sin is not absent," and "even a fool is thought to be wise if he keeps his mouth shut."

I had not faced this reaction in the States (at least not to this extent) because, even though my introversion goes counter to the predominant preference for extraversion, I share a preference for T with the typical US preference. Now, however, I faced an unpleasant reaction wherever I went in Chile. I was surrounded by people with a very different priority system and I felt just as uncomfortable with them (especially because of their reaction to me) as they did with me. Eventually I found myself in a kind of spiritual crisis. It drove me to my knees and to the Word. I read Proverbs again, and began to see certain verses in a new light. Verses that talk about how good it is to be able to say the right words at the right time to be a blessing to others, made me realize that my introversion was more affected by sin than I had realized up to that point. I began to realize that I wasn't really all that concerned to use my words to be a blessing to others—that my introversion was more due to indifference, and less to wisdom, than I had thought.

This process didn't simply add extraversion to my introversion or "feeling" to "thinking." Rather, it began to free me from over dependence on I and T, and to put these preferences more at the service of Christ and his kingdom. Also, it put extraversion and feeling increasingly at the service of introversion and thinking. In other words, I was more likely to use the abilities involved in I and T to reach out to others. This is different from the balance solution, which is not able to distinguish between the gift and over-depending on it. According to the balance solution, you have to deny your giftedness to some extent in order to curb its "excesses."

6.5 Priority Systems and Effective Communication

Different languages tend to "slice the pie" of reality in different ways. That is, languages reflect different priority systems. There is a sense, then, in which each of the priority systems we have described speaks its own language. From a biblical point of view, these languages—all being reflections of God—should dovetail together to enrich one another. However, to the extent that we make idols of our priority systems, and insist on seeing and explaining the world through them, we create barriers to effective communication.

For example, if an N insists on communicating primarily in terms of the future possibilities, he or she will not appreciate or even understand the important contribution of the S who would like to communicate the present realities. The N will accuse the S of being a "bubble burster," of being pessimistic, and not having vision or imagination. The S will accuse the N of being unrealistic, vague, off the wall and impractical. To the extent that their worth is bound up in the strengths inherent in their respective priority systems, they will not be able to appreciate what the other is saying or communicate their ideas effectively. They will be like two ships passing in the night.

The typical literature on the subject suggests the following solution: learn the language of the other priority system. For example, they will give this advice to N's: When communicating ideas to the S priority system, be careful to talk about specifics. Lay out your argument in terms of Who, What When, Why and Where. Give real life examples and lots of details. Their advice to S's is as follows: When communicating with the N priority system, be careful to show how your concerns fit into the larger contexts and wider meanings. Show how they connect to the whole.

There is a sense in which this is not bad advice, but it doesn't get to the root of the problem. We all know that it is one thing to learn the words of a foreign language and quite another to get into its mindset. Learning the words that people with different priority systems like to hear, while still making an idol of your own, ends up being manipulation. You use the words and arguments they want to hear in order to get them on board with what you want to do. To the extent that we make an idol of our priority system, we will be unable to communicate effectively because our sense of worth is bound up in "seeing it our way."

From a biblical point of view, it is only Christ who can rescue us from the barriers that prevent effective communication. To the extent that our worth and identity are found in him, we are rescued from the idolatry of reducing everything to the paradigm provided by our priority system. In the process of effective communication we are challenged to repent of our reductionism and to get a wider view of who God is as we see him reflected in the different ways people communicate with us.

6.6 Priority Systems and the Fruit of the Spirit

Another result of the fall on priority systems is that it is often easier for a person to see how his or her own system reflects God's glory, and how someone else's is affected by sin. Furthermore, since each priority system is a reflection of God and his glory, there is something that looks like the fruit of the Spirit in each. A creational reflection is not the same as the fruit of the Spirit. The one is a natural gift and the other is supernaturally produced. But the natural gift resembles the fruit because they are both from the same God. Because of this, and because we tend to idolize our priority systems, we also tend to confuse them with the fruit of the Spirit. The following chart gives some idea of the ways each aspect of a priority system can be confused with the fruit of the Spirit.

Primary Areas	Possible Confusion with Fruit of the Spirit	Secondary Areas (MBTI terms)	Possible Confusion with Fruit of the Spirit
Knowing	Know God, wisdom	Extraversion (E)	Outgoing, breadth of knowledge
		Introversion (I)	Meditation, depth of knowledge
Doing	Subdue the earth, disciple the nations, work for the kingdom, faithfulness and obedience.	Thinking (T)	Zealous for the truth and justice
		Feeling (F)	Zealous for love, peace, kindness, gentleness
Being	Joy, patience, waiting on the Lord	Sensing (S)	Practical insight and discernment. One step at a time obedience. Submission to authority.
		Intuiting (N)	Vision for the coming of the kingdom, faith

For example, it might be easy for those who lead out with the Feeling preference to think that they are spiritual because of their tendency to seek harmony. Or those who lead out with the Intuition preference might think they are people of great faith because of their optimistic dreams. Those who lead out with Judgment might see themselves as faithful workers bringing in the fullness of the kingdom. Those who lead out with Perception will talk about how they have learned not to take things into their own hands, but to "wait on the Lord." However, even unbelievers who lead out with these priorities will—because they are still God's image—reflect God's glory in these ways. Having the preference as part of one's priority system is not the same as having the fruit of the Spirit.

7.0 The New Heart and the Flesh

7.1 Introduction

If the fall into sin has an effect on our use of priority systems, so does the fact that believers have a new heart. Scripture makes it clear that believers in Christ are a new creation, with a new heart.[42] Not only is it a forgiven heart and cleansed from idols, but a

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[42] See 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (see Galatians 6:15). See Ezekiel 36:25-27 "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new

heart that participates in the new creation planned by God from the beginning. So if believers are a new creation, why do we struggle with sin? It is due to the "flesh."

7.2 The Meaning of "the Flesh"

This word has a range of meanings in Scripture, but should be interpreted primarily in terms of the two ages or worlds referred to in Scripture: this age and the age to come. The flesh refers to the mode of existence characteristic of "this world" and "this age."[43] This age of the flesh corresponds to the "natural body" that God gave Adam in the beginning. The natural body is like a seed[44] that is meant to produce a spiritual body.[45] The flesh, even apart from the fall, is characterized by weakness and is transitory because it has no power within itself to overcome entropy and become something greater than it is. Even though it contains the seeds of the new age, these need to be watered by God's direct intervention in order for the growth to occur.[46]

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spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees. . . ." (See Ezekiel 11:19).

[43] See Paul: An Outline of His Theology, by Herman Ridderbos, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1975. See especially sections 11, 16, 17, 19 and 78. Ridderbos puts "flesh" in a redemptive-historical context.

[44] See pages 28-29.

[45] In 1 Corinthians 15:35ff, Paul contrasts the natural body with the spiritual body. Elements of the fall are evident in his argument, but behind this is the pre-fall difference between the natural and the spiritual. He says you don't plant the body that will be, but just the seed. The natural body is like a seed, that will result in a spiritual body, just as a seed a wheat will produce something much better than itself. So, he says, "if there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body." Then he identifies the natural body with Adam's body before the fall by quoting Genesis 2:7, "The first man Adam became a living being." Adam, with his natural body, was a living being; but Christ was a life-giving Spirit. Christ came to transform Adam's natural body into a Spirit-controlled body—a body that is so energized by the Spirit that it no longer depends on the energy of the sun (there will be no sun in the new earth because Jesus will be the light.), and it no longer needs to recuperate strength by sleep (there will be no night there.)

[46] The flesh is not exactly the same as the body. Paul never talks about the resurrection of the flesh. The body, on the other hand, has two modes: the fleshly mode and the spiritual mode, corresponding to the two ages.
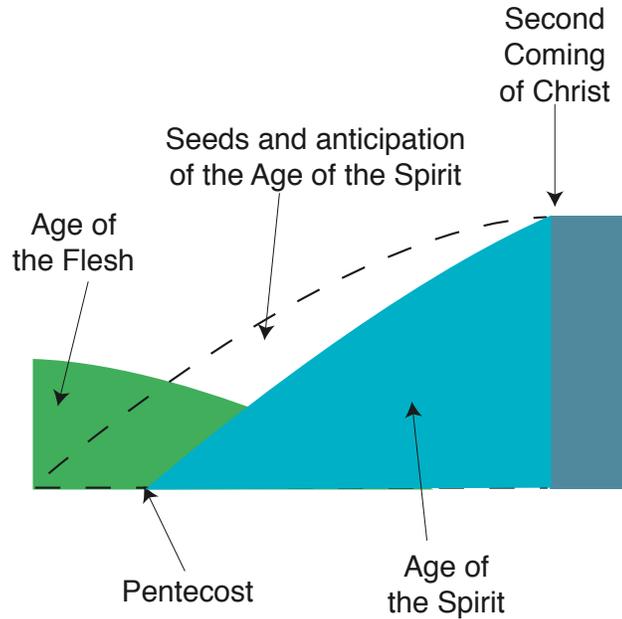
There is nothing sinful about the flesh in itself, just as there is nothing sinful about the natural body God gave Adam. However, because of the fall, both the age of the flesh and the body of flesh have come under God's judgment. There is a sense in which the fall was an attempt to make the flesh independent of God's watering. Adam thought he had at his disposal or could find in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil the resources necessary to find fulfillment apart from God. He made an idol out of the flesh, depending on it for fulfillment instead of trusting God's promise. Trusting the flesh involves depending on resources that are within the boundaries of this age—it involves making idols. It is also a rejection of God's provision through Christ of the eschatological life promised in the tree of life. It is because of this idolization of the flesh that it takes on sinful connotations.

Christ himself was "born according to the flesh"[47] and "revealed in the flesh."[48] That is, his mode of existence was in accordance with the age of the flesh. He was born with a natural body and only after his resurrection received a spiritual body. Even though the

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[47] Romans 1:3
[48] 1 Timothy 3:16

apostles once knew Christ "according to the flesh," after his glorification they did so no longer.[49] If fact, after his glorification, they didn't look at any believers that way, because believers are united to Christ and have been made a new creation.[50] Their identity is no longer defined in terms of the age of the flesh. They have been called into his kingdom and glory, rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.[51]

7.3 Tension between the Age of the Flesh and the Age of the Spirit

Even though believers have a new identity in Christ and are citizens of the age of the Spirit, they still live within the age of the flesh. The age of the flesh was not scheduled to be over until the consummation of the age of the Spirit. The age of the flesh involves a natural process of *becoming* which overlaps with the beginning of the age of the Spirit, but which does not reach its end until the second coming of Christ. What we will be at that time has not yet been made known. But we do know that when Jesus appears we will be like him because we will see him as he is. In the meantime, we are in the process of becoming like him.[52]

Because of the process nature of the age of the flesh, we only gradually get to know ourselves. Even the sinless Son of Man went through this process of *becoming*. He learned obedience and grew in wisdom.[53] When Christ comes again, we will fully know even as we are fully known. Now, however, we know only in part because we are in process.

7.4 The Believer's Struggle with the Flesh

With this in mind, we can more easily understand the nature of the believer's struggle with sin. Imagine a believer as an iceberg, with part of his or her life above water and usually

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[49] 2 Corinthians 5:16
[50] 2 Corinthians 5:17
[51] 2 Thes. 2:12, Colossians 1:13
[52] 1 John 3:2-3
[53] Hebrews 2:10, 5:8, Luke 2:52

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much more of it below water. The part above water is the part of himself that, as far as he knows himself, has been brought into line with his new identity in Christ. The part below the water line is what he is unaware of simply because he is in process.[54] Because of the fall, sin has affected every part of us, including the areas of which we are unaware because we are still in process. There is still much sin affecting us in ways that we don't realize. The sin is forgiven,[55] but we can only deal with it as the Lord brings it to our attention. This usually happens gradually throughout life as he moves us into new and different situations.

Although sin and idols no longer reign over the believer, the "remains" of the formerly reigning idols are lurking in the flesh in the form of self-centered thought patterns, habits and character traits. One of the chief characteristics of the flesh is its compulsion to cling to some aspect of creation in an attempt to find fulfillment of the deep-seated longings for glory that are part of being the image of God. That is, it tempts us to idolatry, and it often does so in the area of our strength. It may also do so, however, in the area of our weakness. In either case, it tempts us to find in creation the fulfillment of our longings for glory.

Because all of creation reflects God's glory, everything was meant to give us a little taste and anticipation of the glory to come. In a fallen world, however, making idols distorts that anticipation and taste of glory. This idolatrous taste can be intoxicating as it seems to provide a measure of satisfaction to our longings for glory. This taste then drives us on to get a bigger taste until—apart from God's grace—we have become enslaved. We increasingly *need* whatever has become an idol to us. In some way our sense of identity is wrapped up with it.

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[54] I am not here dealing with the fact that sometimes people put previously conscious things into their subconscious. Also, it seems to me there is a sort of "in between," where sometimes the waves are up and sometimes they are down. In this in between area, we are becoming aware of some specific issue. In other words, it seems that it's not always so cut and dry as "one day I wasn't aware of this sin, and now I'm very aware of it."

[55] There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

Everything believers do, then, is mixed with sin because of how the flesh affects them. Furthermore, as they face new situations, they are tempted to react by falling back into these former ways. Because they have a new identity, they are commanded not to walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. If someone walks according to the flesh, he or she cannot please God.[56]

Believers, however, are not controlled by the flesh but by the Spirit.[57] When we become aware of sin, we are to bring that area of our lives into line with our new identity. We are to maintain a good conscience, and not let our conscience be seared.[58] In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul is being accused of having selfish motives. This is his reply:

> I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. . . . The Lord will expose the motives of men's hearts.

As far as Paul knows himself, he has good motives. He has a clear conscience. However, he doesn't know himself completely, so he admits his conscience might be wrong. If there is something wrong, the Lord will make it known to him in good time.

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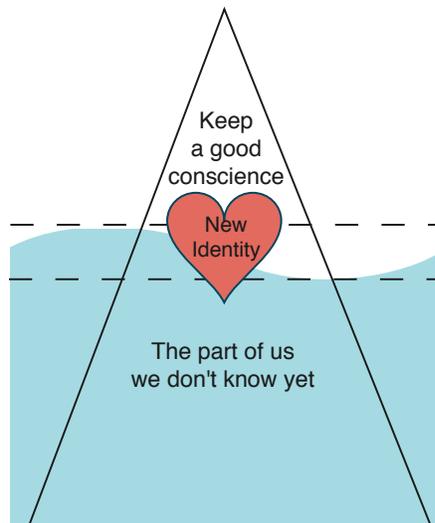
[56] Romans 8:5-8

[57] Romans 5:9

[58] Of course, it is possible to hurt or even sear or "shipwreck" one's conscience (I Tim. 4:2, I Tim 1:19). Usually in such cases, someone else needs to intervene to help us repent and get back on track.

The Psalmist David distinguishes between hidden sins and willful sins. He says, "Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me."[59]

Any sin is ugly and requires judgment. However, there is a big difference between the way God deals with this kind of sin, which requires daily "foot washing,"[60] and rebellion, or sinning "with a raised hand." Of the former, David says, "He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities. . . . As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."[61]

If it is true, as I have suggested, that we tend to make an idol out of our priority system, then even as believers we will be struggling throughout our lives with the "remains" of this formerly reigning idol. We will constantly be learning in ever deeper ways how sin has affected our priority system.

7.5 Challenging Situations

There are two situations that are particularly suited to bring these vestiges of idolatry to the surface: marriage and cross-cultural missions. Marriage is conducive to helping two people understand how sin has affected their respective priority systems because of the

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[59] Psalm 19:12-13. See also Leviticus 4-5 on "unintentional sins." These also make one guilty, but offerings and restitution are made only after one becomes aware of them.

[60] John 13:10-11

[61] Psalm 103:9-14; John W. Sanderson, Jr. once told me a story to illustrate this point: Three children, ages 8-10, got permission from their mother to make a cake for their dad's birthday. This was their first attempt, but they wanted to do it because they loved their father so much. They spent all day in the kitchen and decorating the house. They were so excited when the father finally came home from work. They shouted "surprise," jumped all over him, and had him sit down at the table. There they all gathered around and served him a piece of cake. "We made it ourselves," they said. They all watched how he would react to the first bite. Well, he just about choked because they had tripled the amount of sugar, and had unknowingly used salt instead of sugar. It was also a little burned. How do you think the father reacted? He ate the whole thing, with a smile, thanking his children. Of course, if he had gone to a restaurant and they had served him a piece of cake like that, he would have demanded another piece or else his money back. What was they difference? These were his children. Everything we do for the Lord is mixed with "salt;" however, the Father accepts it graciously and willingly for the sake of Jesus.

closeness of the relationship. You can keep other people who challenge the sin of your system at an arm's distance. But if you want to have any kind of fulfilling relationship with your spouse, you simply have to deal with these issues.

Cross-cultural missions tends to produce the same effect, not so much because of the closeness of the situation, but because you are surrounded by people who have a different priority system. Unless you retreat from the culture, and if you want to have any kind of meaningful ministry, you simply have to deal with the issues.

This issue also regularly shows up in church situations. We expect the gospel to bring people close to each other, and we encourage close relationships. However, closeness always brings priority systems into conflict, and you have to desire the fellowship more than you want to avoid the pain of discovering how sin affects your priority system. Many unbelievers or people who used to attend church say they stopped going because of conflict with people. A similar dynamic shows up on teams of missionaries who are supposed to work closely together.

7.6 Conclusion

According to John 7:37-39, we can overcome the temptations of the flesh by "drinking of Christ," which is believing in him. When we do this, streams of water—the Holy Spirit—flow out from us to be a blessing to others. When we do not drink of Christ, the streams dry up and we are not a blessing to others. Instead of being full and overflowing with blessings, we are empty and grasping for something to fill us up. When our sense of identity or worth is bound up with anything other than Christ—like the strengths of our priority system—we are not drinking of Christ and we dry up. For example, when F's need harmony in order to function, they make that need more important that Christ. When T's get depressed

when they can't win an argument, they show they are empty and not depending on Christ. In order to believe in Christ we must also reject dependence on the strengths of our priority system. This is called repentance. Faith in Christ without repentance doesn't work.

8.0 Priority Systems, Culture and Organizations

Cultures and organizations, as well as individuals, have priority systems. These are not exactly parallel since personality is an individual system, whereas the others are collective systems. In a collective system, not every individual has the personality type that reflects the priority system of the collective. A collective priority system is not simply the sum or average of its individual members. It is possible, in fact, that not even the majority of members of a collective have the personality type that would express the priority system of the collective. People come and go in a collective, but the priority system tends to remain the same. A collective priority system has to do with the way certain characteristics or values are embedded in the structures of society. "The way we've always done things" doesn't depend on individual members but on the way values become an unquestioned way of life and work.

The Latin culture, for example, tends to lead out with being. They give priority to personal relationships and to the enjoyment of life. They are FP's in the Myers-Briggs terminology.[62] The US culture, on the other hand, has traditionally been a culture that leads out with doing.[63] Other cultures lead out with knowing.

Churches or denominations also have priority systems. It is my observation, for example, that Reformed churches tend to lead out with knowing, Pentecostal churches with

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[62] The "P" means they give priority to enjoying and adapting to life instead of organizing it. The "F" means that when they make decisions, they do so with reference to the "being" corner of the triangle.

[63] I say "traditionally" because it seems to me that the cultural preference is shifting to the "being" pole. This is the Post Modern mood. But there is still a lot of "doing" emphasis in the US. "Knowing" is probably second for the US culture.

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being, and Baptist churches with doing. This is not bad in itself, but to the extent that each church gets "stuck" in its area of preference, polarization and distortion tend to occur.[64]

We could also analyze religious ideologies in this way. For example, Liberation Theology leads out with—and gets stuck on—the doing pole. "Praxis" is the key word. Neo-Orthodoxy leads out with—and gets stuck on—the being pole. The words of the Bible have no value unless they "become" revelation for you in the context of a personal encounter with God. After the personal encounter the words cease to be God's revelation.

9.0 Priority Systems: Names, Longings for Glory and Paradigms

In his book, *Called to the Ministry*,[65] Edmund Clowney shows from Scripture that every Christian has two names given to him by God. One of these is God's own name, and every Christian bears it. We are all called by his name,[66] baptized into the name of the Trinity,[67] identified with the name of Christ. Our name is "Christian." This is what Clowney calls our "last name," but it always comes first in importance. This name represents our ultimate priority.[68]

The second name God gives us—our "first" name—is unique for each individual. In Revelation 2:17, Jesus promises to those who overcome a new name that no one knows except the one receiving it. This name fits and describes the unique person God has made each of his children to be. It may not fit as well now as it will in the future. For example, when Jesus called Simon, he gave him a new name that didn't describe what he was like at

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[64] For more information, see the chapter "The Spiral Movement," in my book *Toward a Theology of Movement.*

[65] Clowney, Edmund P., *Called to the Ministry*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), pp.4-11.

[66] Isaiah 43:6-7

[67] Matthew 28:19

[68] See page 10 for the distinction between "main" or "ultimate" priorities and secondary ones.

that time, but what he would become through his union with Christ. However, it describes the unique way each of God's children was made to reflect his glory.

Of course, we don't know yet exactly what that name is, but I believe we can often get a glimpse of it as we see the Lord using us and the gifts he has given us for the good of his kingdom. Furthermore, we know that it will be a reflection of Christ.[69] It is in this sense that it is often helpful to formulate a personal mission statement. Formulating a personal mission statement is basically making a tentative guess, based on what you know now, of what you think your unique God-given name is.

If the name "Christian" indicates our ultimate priority system that we share with all believers, then our unique name indicates, to a large extent, our personal priority system.

One's personal priority system, as affected by other priority systems, gives shape in a fundamental way to the longings for fulfillment and glory that one experiences because of the different aspects of God's revelation upon which it focuses. In other words, though we all long for glory and the upward movement, we may focus on different aspects of it because of our different priority systems.

As a result, different priority systems bring to our attention in a forceful way different aspects of God's revelation and the future glory implied in them. They form a paradigm that enables us to see certain aspects of God's glory and revelation more readily. The unique priority system reflected in the unique name given to each believer thus becomes a tool in God's hands to teach his children about himself. It is because of this that all believers need each other.[70]

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[69] We are now the children of God. What we will become has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears we will be like him. I John 3:2

[70] See the chapter "The Spiral Movement" in my book *Toward a Theology of Movement* for a further elaboration of this theme. Also see "The Centripetal Movement" in the same book.

This same principle can be applied to the differences among cultures. To the extent that different cultures reflect different priority systems, they tend to ask different questions. It is true that, because of the fall, there is an important sense in which every question asked by unbelievers is the wrong question. On the other hand, behind the sinful distortion of the questions posed by unbelievers and their cultures, are questions that arise from the fact that we are all made in God's image and live in his world. Because different cultures have different priority systems, they tend to bring out different aspects of the rich meaning of Scripture when they face it in a serious way.

The contextualization of the gospel is an attempt to apply Scripture to a given culture and its unique priority system. It does not mean giving them a reduced gospel. We do not apply Scripture *only* to the issues that are most important to them. It does mean, though, that the gospel must speak to their priority system if it is to engage their hearts in the most meaningful way possible.

Any culture will tend to have a reductionistic view of the gospel to the extent that it does not communicate with, understand and love believers from other cultures. The church in a given culture is capable of understanding all the dimensions of the gospel, but this usually happens as it rubs shoulders with and learns to appreciate the church in other cultures, including those of years gone by. It is only together with all the saints that we will be able to understand what is beyond understanding—all the dimensions of the love of Christ.[71]

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[71] Ephesians 3:17-19