

A pair of ornate, dark metal scales of justice, symbolizing balance and ethics. The scales are centered in the frame, with the title text overlaid on them. The background is dark and slightly blurred, emphasizing the scales and the text.

# AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN ETHICS





# Introduction

After examining the first two vertices of *The Triangle of Necessary and Sufficient Conditions* in our Triperspectival Model - the deontological and situational perspectives - we made our initial inquiry last week into the ***Existential Perspective***. This is not the same thing as *Existentialism*, but defining existentialism will provide us with some important insights before we examine this perspective more thoroughly. The late Dr. Allen Killen, who taught philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary from 1971 to 1991, offers a useful definition of existentialism: “The easiest way to define ***existentialism*** is simply to call it the opposite of ***essentialism***. The one, namely, essentialism, begins above in heaven or the sphere of transcendence; the other, namely existentialism, begins





# Introduction

below on earth and attempts to work its way up. *Essentialism* starts with Being, Essence, the All, or in the case of Christianity, with the triune God revealed in the Bible. *Existentialism*, in contrast, begins with man and existence.” Killen goes on to say that because existentialism begins with man, “it finds itself plagued by an utter relativism since **it lacks any independent transcendent point of absolute reference by which to establish truth**....Man, therefore, cannot have either direct revelation or an absolute point of reference from beyond existence.” With Sartre’s particular brand of existentialism, we find that he “cannot establish any norms (deontology), nor can he say man is responsible either to himself or his fellow man, or to God, for what he does. He





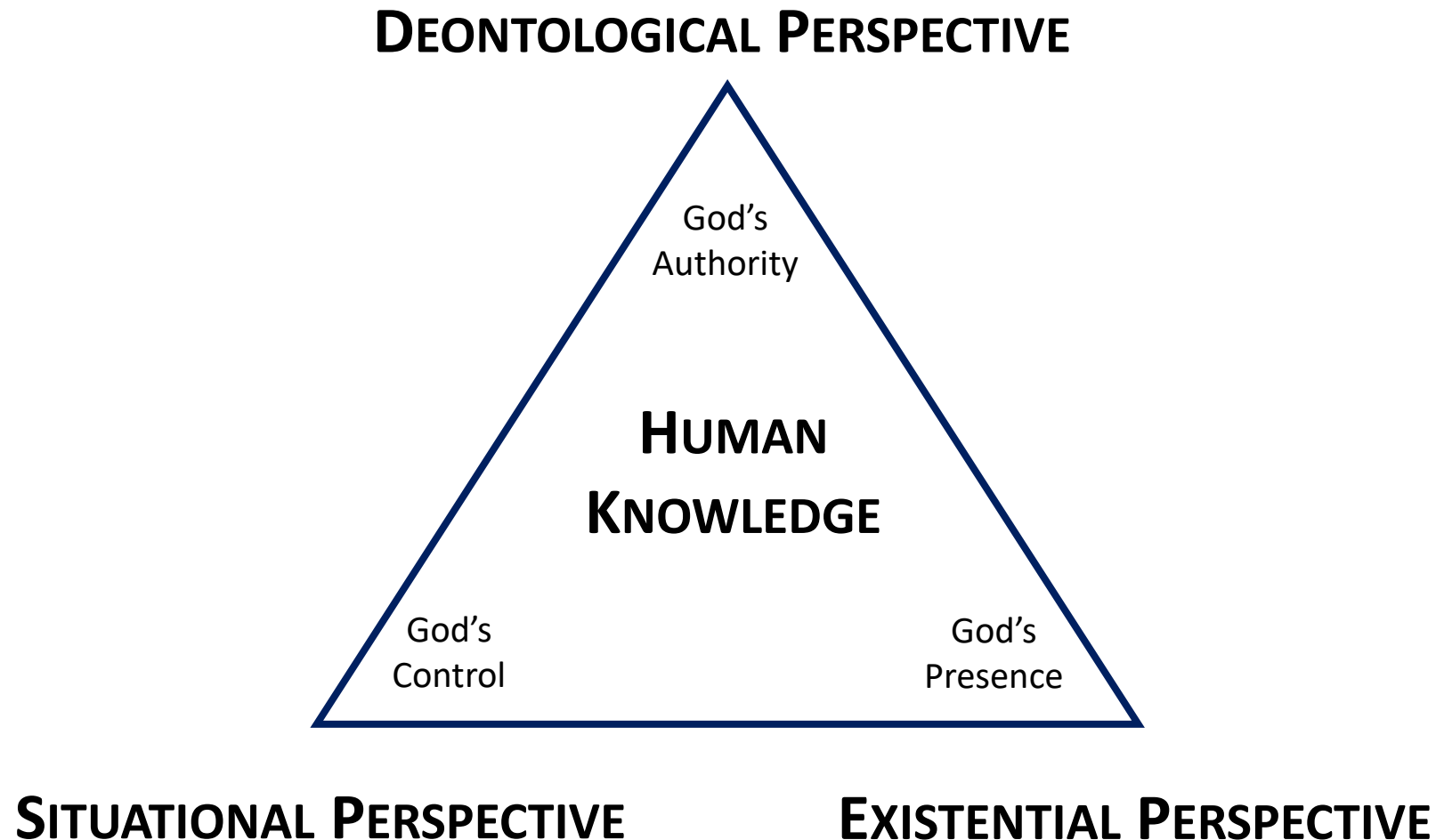
# Introduction

becomes a real man just as soon and only as he makes decisions and puts them into effect” (Killen). To Sartre, we are radically free.

In contrast to existentialism, the Scriptures insist that God has spoken (deontological), that He is in control of, and interprets, all facts (situational), **AND** that we are a part of the problem and a part of the solution as we make ethical decisions (existential perspective). The existential *perspective*, therefore, must not be confused with existentialism nor omitted in our thinking as we seek to make ethical decisions. In order to be wise and live for the glory of God, we must carefully consider what it means to be made in His image and to live *coram Deo*. Everyone, ultimately, must answer the question: “What does it mean to be human?”

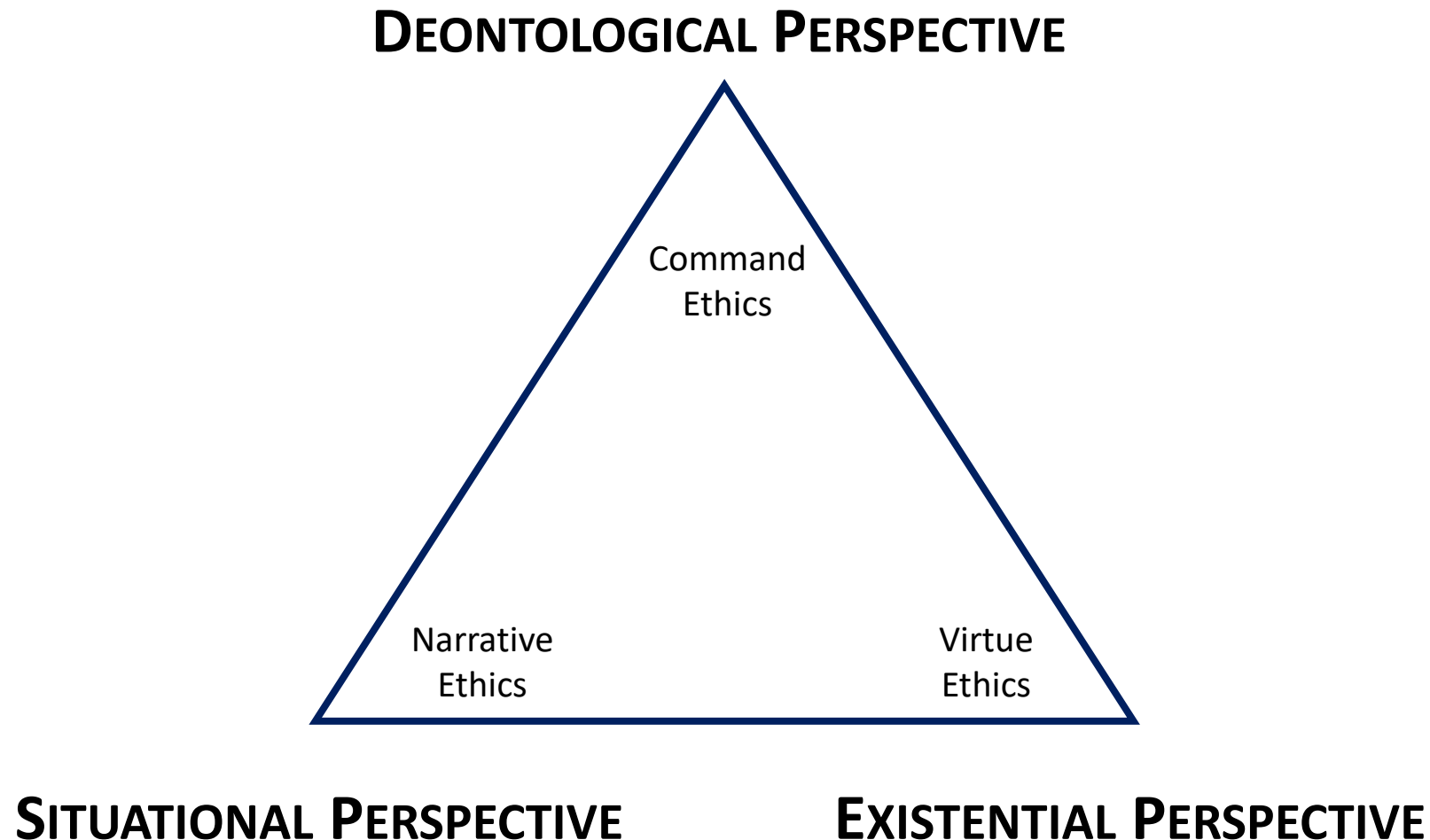


# The Triangle of Necessary & Sufficient Conditions





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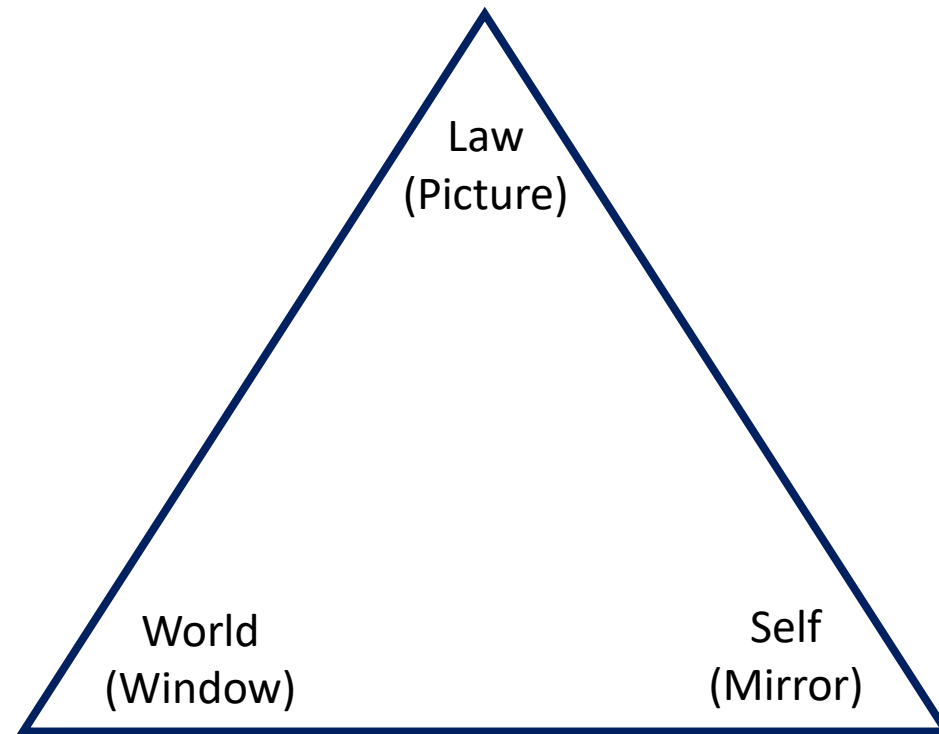






# A Practical Guide

## DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



**SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

**EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE**





# Existential Perspective: Right Motive

DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

If I Am to Please God, How Must I Be Changed?

- God is Good
- Goodness is God
- God's Example to Us of Ethical Perfection
- God's Relationship to His Creatures

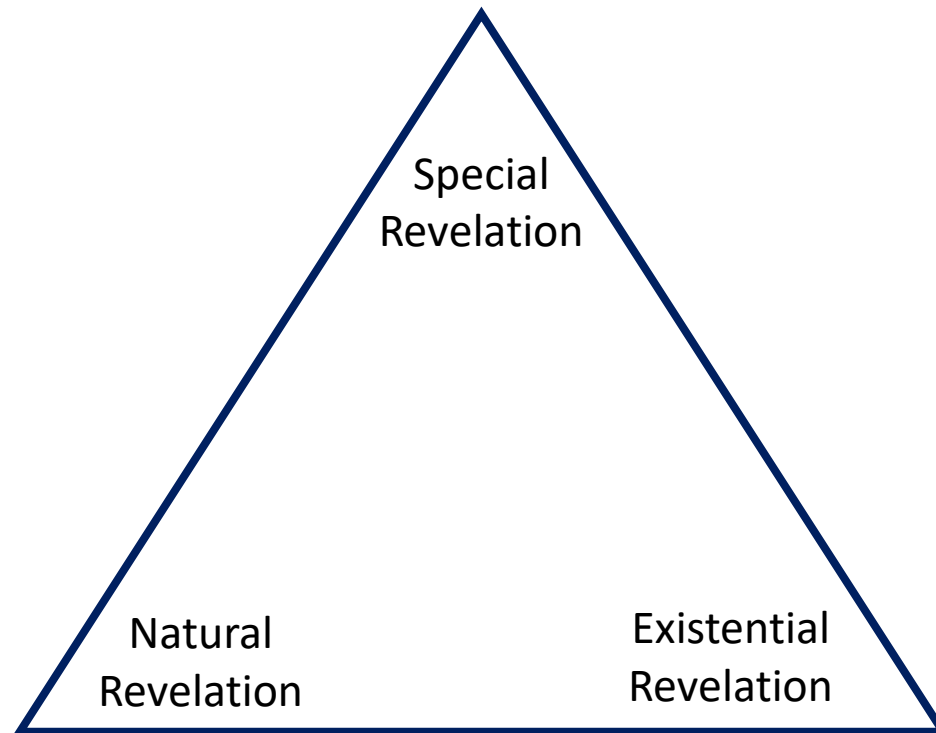
SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

**EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE**



# The Existential Perspective: Right Motive

## DEONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



- “I cannot know myself rightly until I see myself as God’s image” (Frame).
- How am I a part of the problem and a part of the solution?
- What am I thinking, feeling, believing?
- How would I describe my inner life, my heart?
- What are my motives?
- Will I choose to obey?
- Have I prayed?

SITUATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE





# The Existential Tradition in Secular Ethics

“Secular ethics misuses the existential perspective by absolutizing the authority of the mind, will, and feelings. It affirms radical autonomy, and, when it sees the limitations of reason, it replaces or supplements it with autonomous human will or feeling....It is irrationalistic when it denies the knowability of the world and the accessibility of moral standards” (John Frame).

**EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE**





# The Image Before the Fall

- Man at creation was like God, though “the analogy between God and ourselves will always have disanalogy (lack of similarity or correspondence) with it” (Frame).
- Man was raised immeasurably above all other creatures of the world.
- Man was capable of perfect communion with his Maker.
- Man loved God in total self-devotion and gladly gave himself to all that God requires.
- Man could discern good from evil, truth from error.
- “God has made man like himself to equip him for his task as lord, a lord substitute to God’s ultimate lordship (Frame).”





# Man's Original Condition

“In his original condition of moral rectitude, man loved God in total self-devotion and gladly gave himself to all that God requires. He knew the truth and did it. His created dignity consisted in knowledgeable and responsible relationships to the supernatural world and to fellow humans. His life was intended to consist of intelligible and dutiful devotion to God who is himself the truth and the good, and of service to his earthly neighbor. His mental capacity transcended the changing sensory realm; it included general ideas conducive to intelligible conversation and fellowship with God.”

- Carl F.H. Henry



# Man's Relationship with God Before the Fall



Carl F.H. Henry  
1913-2003

“Created man knew God’s revealed truth and declared will, and loved, trusted and obeyed Him. His fellowship with God was unbroken; he lived a moral life in truth, a life consonant with God’s revelation pulsating through the *imago Dei*. To God he gave his whole heart, his undivided self; God’s light and law were his highest fealty (obligation of fidelity) and felicity (happiness).”



# Elements of the Divine Image

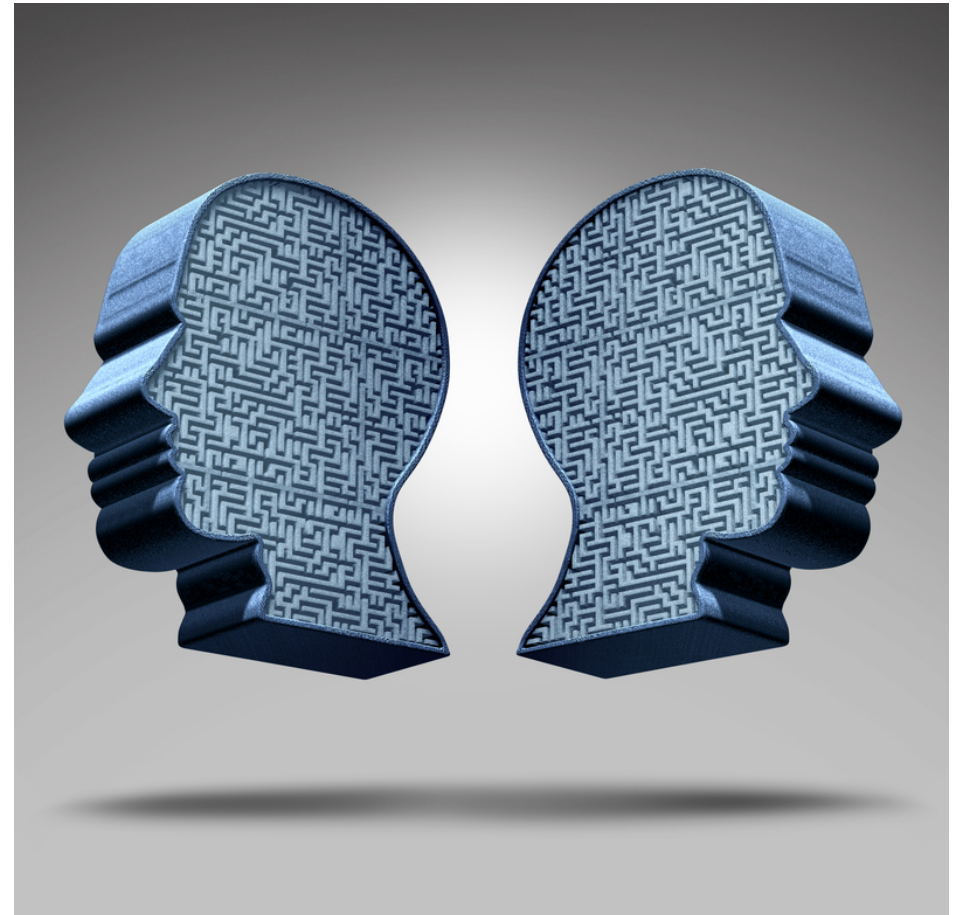
- Rational aptitudes (intellectual power; First Principles: Law of Identity, Law of Non-Contradiction, & Law of the Excluded Middle)
- Moral aptitudes (good and evil; right and wrong; conscience)
- Capacity for self-transcendence
- Volitional aptitudes (man's exercise of his will)
- Spirituality (the capacity to know God)
- Immortality (not eternality, but eternal life)
- Emotional aptitudes
- Dominion over the earth (pre-eminence over the animals)
- Self-consciousness (the immediate certainty of my own being)



# The Fall: Mankind Spoiled

“Man in the present life is divided in his personality. Since the Fall there is no truly healthy person in his body, and there is no completely balanced person psychologically. The result of the Fall spoils us as a unit and in all our parts.”

- Francis A. Schaeffer







# “Catastrophic Personality Shock”

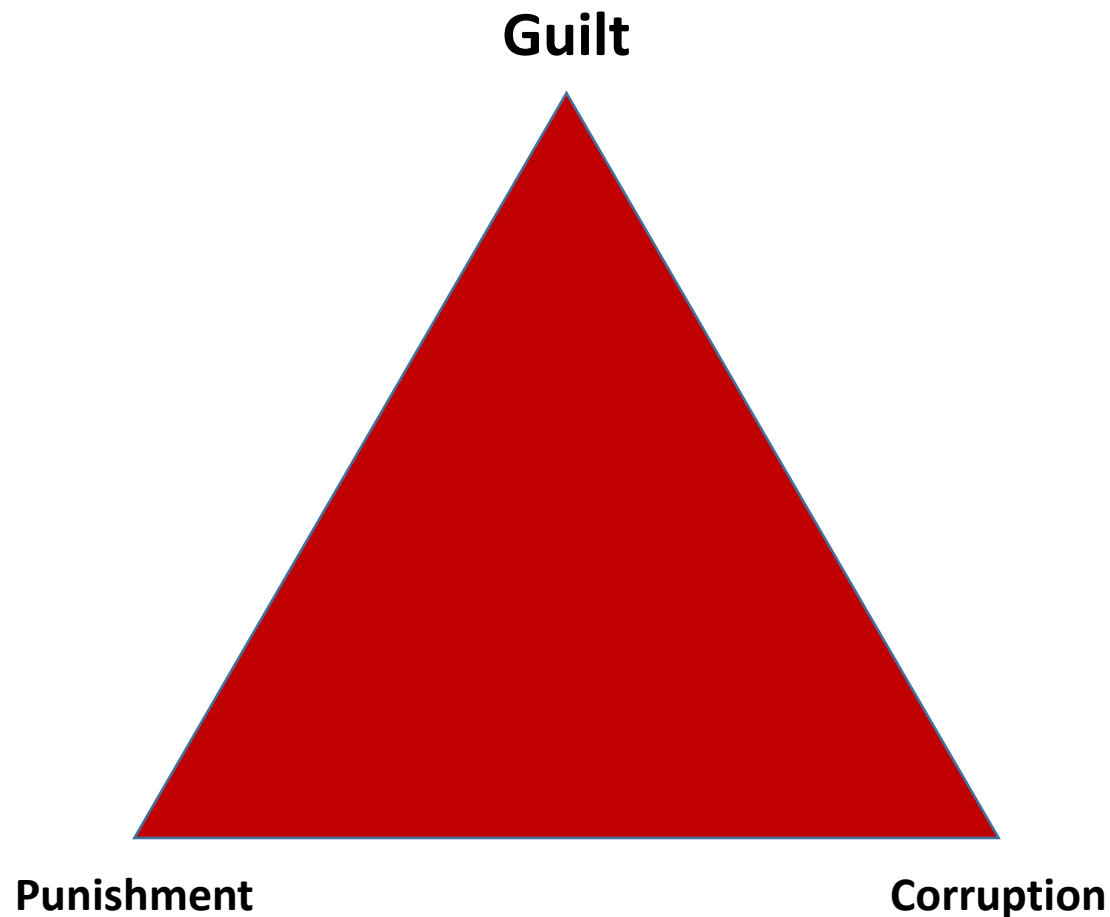
“The fall of man was a catastrophic personality shock; it fractured human existence with a devastating fault. Ever since, man’s worship and contemplation of the living God have been broken, his devotion to the divine will shattered. Man’s revolt against God therefore affects his entire being; he is now motivated by an inordinate will; he no longer loves God nor his neighbor; he devotes human reasoning to the cause of spiritual rebellion. He seeks escape from the claim of God upon his life and blames his fellow man for his own predicament. His revolt against God is at the same time a revolt against truth and the good; his rejection of truth is a rejection of God and the good, his defection from the good a repudiation of God and the truth.”

- Carl F.H. Henry





# The Effects of the Fall



- **Guilt:** Our liability for breaking God's command (deontological).
- **Punishment:** The curse that comes upon the creation and upon ourselves because of the first sin (situational).
- **Corruption:** Our continuing sinfulness, including our sinful heart, and our resulting delight in sin (existential)



# The Renewed Image in Christ

- “...and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a **true knowledge** according to the image of the One who created him” (Col. 3:9-10).
- “...and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in **righteousness** and **holiness** of the truth” (Eph. 4:24).
- Believers **are** light in the Lord. “You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8).
- The law is written on our hearts. “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33).





**Jerry Bridges**

1929-2016

“So we see that God has made provision for our holiness. Through Christ He has delivered us from sin’s reign so that we now can resist sin. But the responsibility for resisting is ours. God does not do that for us. To confuse the *potential* for resisting (which God provided) with the *responsibility* for resisting (which is ours) is to court disaster in our pursuit of holiness.”





# Virtue Ethics

- As believers we must focus on our sanctification.
- Biblical virtues are what God requires of us as His children.
- Biblical virtues motivate us to do good works.
- “We are not only scribes, poring over God’s statutes (normative), and pilgrims, walking toward a goal (situational), but also children, trusting their heavenly father, knowing that he will prove true (existential)...” (Frame).
- Some of the more important biblical virtues are faith, repentance, hope, love, and the fear of God.





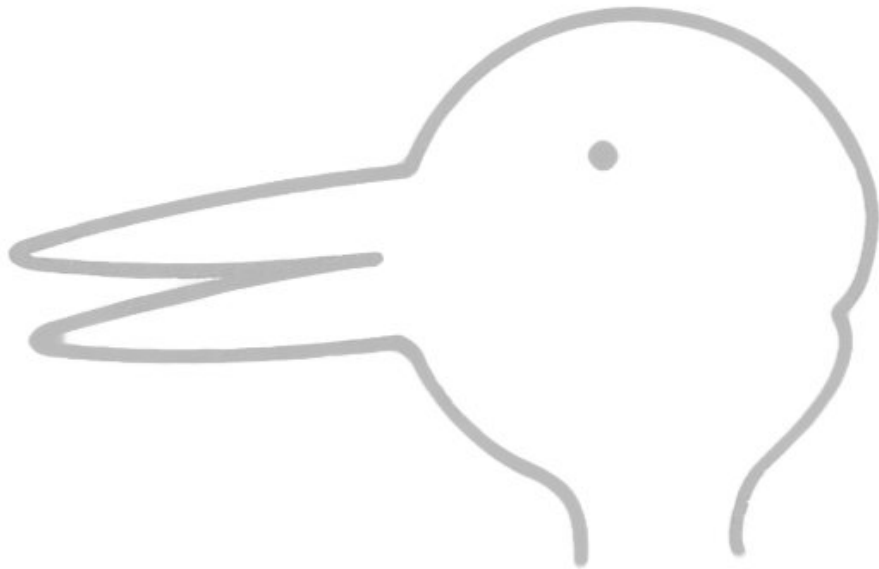
# Moral Discernment

- We come to know God's will through Scripture.
- We come to know the will of God through ethical discipline (Rom. 12:1-2), nonconformity to the world, the renewal of our mind, walking as children of light (Eph. 5:8), and abounding in love (Phil. 1:9).
- Guidance also comes through wise counsel (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6).
- "Much of the work of application lies with us, led by the Spirit and by the general principles of Scripture" (Frame). We may not be able to "see" moral patterns and analogies.





# Duck-Rabbit



- “Seeing as” is not the same as “seeing.”
- One person looking at the picture on the left will see a duck while another will see a rabbit - even though they see the same lines on the paper.
- So it is with us when we see our lives in the light of Scripture.
- We need the Holy Spirit to illumine and confirm the revelation God has already given to us.



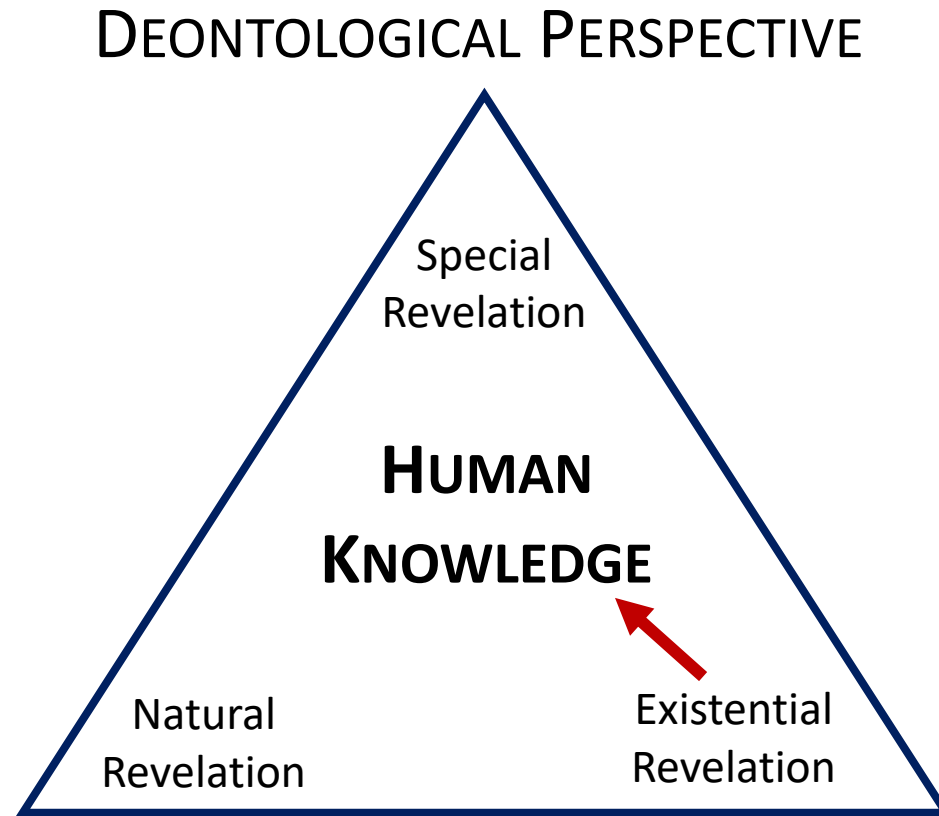


# How God Leads Us

“God’s ethical guidance of his people does not add new sentences to the canon of Scripture. But neither is it necessarily an intellectual process. God deals with us personally, even inwardly. His operations within us are mysterious, not to be simply described or categorized. He can work through the subconscious, through dreams, through memory and intuition, as well as through what we usually call the intellect. Reformed theology has always acknowledged the necessity of the Spirit’s illumination in enabling believers to understand the Word. But it is important that we see this illuminating work of God, not only enabling us to formulate doctrines, but also enabling us to apply Scripture to our circumstances, and to see our experiences and inner life in biblical terms” (Frame).



# Review: The Existential Perspective

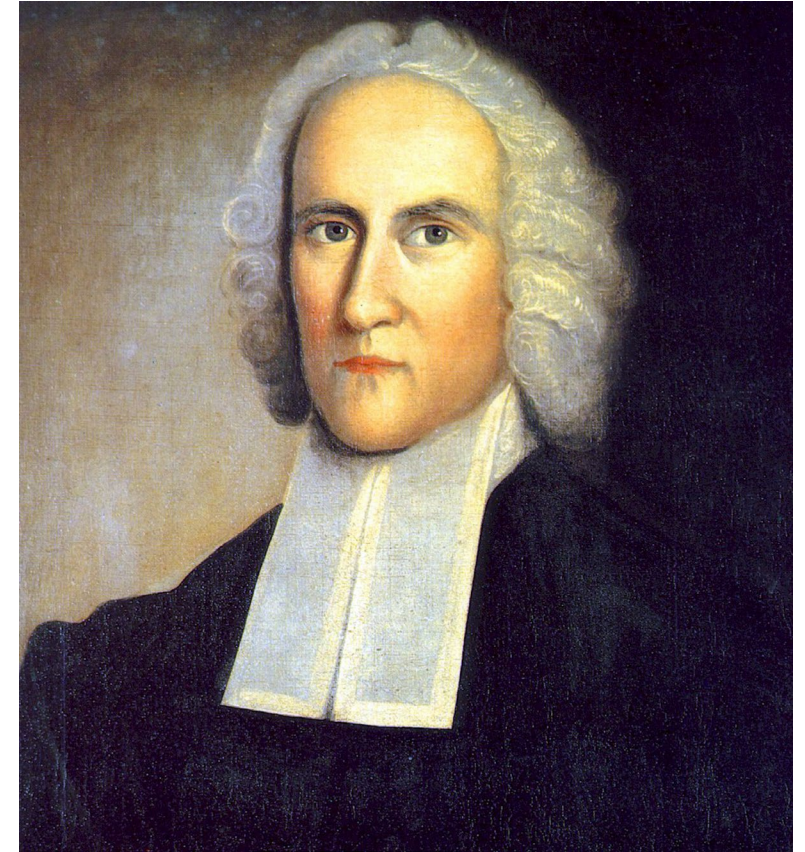


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# Jonathan Edwards

“Resolved, never to give over, not in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruption, however unsuccessful I may be.”



**Jonathan Edwards**

1703-1758

Greatest Theologian and Philosopher  
of British American Puritanism