

SYSTEM THEOLOGY

Ad Imaginem · unto the image

SYSTEM THEOLOGY

Ad Imaginem · Volume I

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God finishes what He started.

PHILIPPIANS 1 : 6

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

LUKE 9 : 2 3

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

GALATIANS 2 : 2 0

*For the ones still finding the way back to Peace,
and for the shepherds who go looking for them.*

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0

The Chazon

חֲזוֹן *chazon* · the vision, written to be run with

"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it."

Habakkuk 2:2

The Word and the Sight

This work opens with a vision because Scripture does. Before the Law is given, before the tabernacle is raised, before a single command is obeyed, God shows Himself. He appears, He discloses, He makes the unseen seen. The Hebrew word at the head of this page is *chazon*, and it does not mean an idea a person invents or a goal a person sets for himself. It descends from the root *chazah*, to see, to behold, to gaze upon what is real. It is not the ordinary seeing of the eyes, which Hebrew calls *raah*; it is the granted sight of what is otherwise hidden, the seeing God gives. This is why the men who carried it were first called seers, *roeh* and *chozeh*, before they were ever called prophets: "he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer" (1 Samuel 9:9). A prophet is, first and beneath everything else, one who has been made to see.

And the seeing is always God's gift, never the seer's achievement. "If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream" (Numbers 12:6). Vision is reception before it is anything else. A person does not climb up to it; it is handed down to them. This governs the whole of this work: what is seen truly about a soul is seen because God has disclosed it, not because an instrument was clever. The measurement that follows in these pages is only the catching of a sight that already exists, whole and exact, in the mind of God.

Scripture treats the presence or absence of vision as the difference between a people who hold together and a people who come apart. "Where there is no

vision, the people cast off restraint" (Proverbs 29:18); the verb beneath cast off restraint is *para*, to unravel, to break loose, to run wild. Without the sight God gives, human beings do not merely lack inspiration; they disintegrate. The darkest seasons of the Bible are marked precisely by its absence: "the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread vision" (1 Samuel 3:1); "her prophets find no vision from the LORD" (Lamentations 2:9); a famine, "not of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). A soul that has never been shown how God sees it is a soul living in that famine, whatever else it owns.

Then comes the charge this page is built upon. Habakkuk, standing on his watch, is told what to do with the vision once it is given: "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come" (Habakkuk 2:2-3). Four things are said, and all four govern this Canon. The vision is to be written, fixed, not left to memory or mood. It is to be made plain, so plain a person can read it on the run. It is to be run with, for it moves a life toward something. And it is for an appointed time, it carries the reader toward an end. And the very next verse, the hinge of the whole gospel, names how a person is to live in the gap between the vision and its arrival: "the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Vision, written, made plain, run with, by faith, toward an appointed end. That single sentence is the shape of this entire work.

And the vision has a face. What the prophets saw in part, the New Testament names in full: the appointed end of all seeing is Christ. "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). We are those who, "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18), "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), until the day when "we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Every true vision in Scripture was pointing there. So is this one. The chazon of

this Canon is the sight of a single soul, written plain, given to be run with, that points past itself to the face of God.

0.1 The one thing

This entire work exists to do one thing: to help a person see the truth of themselves as God sees it, and then be walked home. Everything downstream of this page, the measures and the capacities, the mirrors and the levels, the assessment and the report, is machinery in the service of that single sentence. Whenever any part of it forgets this, it has begun to drift, and it must be brought back here.

The one thing rests on a truth older than any instrument: that God already sees the person completely. In the wilderness, the cast-out slave woman Hagar became the first person in Scripture to name God from her own experience, and the name she gave Him was El Roi, "You are the God who sees me" (Genesis 16:13). The deepest comfort of the Psalter is not that God is powerful but that He is not fooled and not far: "O LORD, You have searched me and known me... You understand my thought afar off... and are acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:1-3). Where a man "looks at the outward appearance, the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7), and "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). His sight is total, and it is tender. This work does not manufacture that sight; it borrows a little of it and makes it plain, so that the person and the shepherd may see, for a moment, the way God already sees, always.

0.2 The two sides

A person cannot be shown how far they have fallen without also being shown what they fell from. So this work holds two sides at once. There is the design, who a person was formed to be before fear ever touched them, the measure of the fullness of Christ pressed into one particular soul (Ephesians 4:13; Genesis 1:27). And there is the distortion, the descent, how that design

bends and breaks and drifts under fear (Genesis 3). Design and distortion. Who you were made to be, and who you became.

A vision that shows only one side is not the vision God gives. A sight that only flatters is an idol, and a sight that only accuses is despair. The true vision holds both without blinking. When God sent Nathan to David, the same word that honored the man after God's own heart also said, without softening, "You are the man" (2 Samuel 12:7). The Word itself is a mirror that shows a person "his natural face" (James 1:23), and it does not touch up what it shows. The gap between the design and the distortion is not a data point to be filed. It is the exact stretch of ground a person must be carried across to come home, and this whole work exists to measure that ground and to name the way over it.

0.3 What it is for

This is for the shepherd across the table from someone who is clearly struggling and has no words for it, and for the person alone at night who feels something and does not know where to go. It lets a pastor see a soul instead of a symptom: where they were designed, where they are bent, where they stand with God, and the next true step. And it hands the person a figure from Scripture who walked their exact road, so they know they are neither the first nor alone.

God's oldest charge against the shepherds of His people was a failure of sight before it was a failure of love: "The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick... nor sought what was lost" (Ezekiel 34:4). They could not see beneath the wound to the person under it. The Good Shepherd sees. He looked on the crowds and "was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36); He looked up into a tree and saw, past the tax collector everyone despised, a hungry man He would eat with that day (Luke 19:5). This work is a lamp for that kind of seeing. But the seeing is not the end of it. It is discipleship wearing the clothes of an assessment. The assessment is only the

door. The formation is the room, and the room is Christ, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

0.4 The why

The truth about the human person already lives in Scripture. God named the heart, the descent, the design, and the way home long before the world described the shadows of them. So this work is not the building of something new. It is the reclaiming of something old: the measure of the soul, taken back from every instrument that stops at the self, and turned to point at God.

Scripture claims this ground for itself: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The law of the LORD is already "perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7); it reaches where no instrument reaches, "piercing even to the division of soul and spirit... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Every secular tool ends at the person, because "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... nor can he know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14). This work measures more than any of them, and then it bows, and says that the rest is known only to Him, and here is the One who can heal what we have found.

0.5 A warning to myself

The measurement is never the point. The measurement serves the meeting. When I am lost in the counting, let this page find me. I am building a mirror that shows a person the truth and then points past itself, to the God who made them, loved them before they were born, and is already carrying them home. That is what all of this is for, and nothing it becomes is permitted to be for less.

The gravest danger of a work like this is the exact danger Jesus named in the men who knew the Scriptures best. "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). They

counted every letter and missed the Messiah standing in front of them. Knowledge that does not arrive at love "is nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). So this page stands as a sentry over all the pages after it: the moment the measuring becomes the point instead of the meeting, the mirror has become an idol, and the whole work has failed at the one thing it was made to do.

Where there is no vision, the people unravel. Here is the vision, written plain.

Let everything that follows run from it, and let all of it run home.

P A R T O N E

Imago Facta

The Image Made

I

A word on how this book reads Scripture. When a Hebrew or Greek word is opened, the plain lexical sense, the one you will find in BDB, HALOT, or BDAG, is given first; any fuller reading I draw from it is offered as interpretation, not as the word's dictionary meaning. And where states, levels, or patterns are set in an order, the words are Scripture's, but the arrangement is my proposed reading of them, offered to be tested against the text, never as a claim that Scripture teaches the system in that form. I have tried to earn every step from the text, and to mark plainly where I am reading rather than translating.

The Line

לֵב · καρδία *kardia* · *the heart, the ground beneath all conduct*

Proverbs 4:23, NKJV

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.

Why the church's formation tools reach so far, and no further

Jesus looked up into a sycamore tree and saw a small man who had climbed it just to catch a glimpse of him passing by. Every person in Jericho knew what Zacchaeus was, a tax collector, a collaborator, a thief of his own people. What they could see was his sin. What they could name was his behavior.

Jesus saw something else entirely.

He did not see a sinner to be rebuked. He saw a man whose interior life, beneath the greed, beneath the compromise, beneath the armor of wealth and position, was organized around a hunger so deep he had climbed a tree like a child just to see if what he had heard about this rabbi was true. Jesus read what was happening below the surface. And he aimed there.

Zacchaeus, come down. I must stay at your house today.

No sermon. No confrontation. No program. Just, I see what is actually happening in you. And I am coming there.

There is a way to know what Zacchaeus feels on the inside. What Martha needs in her exhaustion. What Elijah requires under the broom tree.

The Gap

People sit in great churches. They hear inspired, Spirit-filled messages week after week. They give. They serve. They love God, and they mean it. Some of them lead. Some of them preach.

And yet, their mind will not stop racing. Their heart is pulled in directions they don't understand and don't want. They live with anxiety, worry, and an interior chaos that no amount of truth, accountability, or spiritual effort has been able to quiet. They hear the message on Sunday and by Tuesday they are living as though they never heard it at all.

This is not a failure of faith. It is not a failure of the preaching. It is the life they don't want, and they cannot explain why they are still living it.

The reason is simple and devastating: every tool the church deploys is working above the level where the person actually lives.

The Line

There is a threshold in every human being, a line between what is conscious and what is not. Above the line lives the mind, the will, the emotions, the decisions. This is where every formation tool the church uses operates:

Sermons. Small groups. Accountability. Bible study. Discipleship programs. Counseling. Weekend events. Seminars.

All of it is good. All of it works, up to a point. And then it stops. Because all of it is working above the line.

Below the line is the sub-cognitive structure of the heart, the orientational posture formed through years of lived experience, repeated patterns, wounds, attachments, and practiced misalignment, that now operates automatically,

beneath awareness, and organizes everything that flows upward from it: identity, narrative, perception, emotion, choice, behavior.

This structure was built before the person ever walked into a church. It is still running. Still driving. Still organizing the whole interior life, regardless of what the person consciously believes, commits to, or desperately wants to change.

The Disease: Self, World, and Devil

John named the three architects precisely:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.

1 John 2:16

The lust of the flesh. The lust of the eyes. The pride of life. These are not merely external temptations. They are the self, the world, and the devil, three active forces that have been conducting formation work in every human being from birth, building a sub-cognitive structure organized around one root disease: self-sovereignty.

The Fall was not merely a moral failure, it was a transfer of the throne. The organizing center of human life moved from God to self. And the world system and the enemy have been reinforcing that transfer every day since. By the time a person walks through the church door, the construction is decades old. The throne is occupied. And it sits below the line.

It was, first and fully, rebellion against God's command, and it incurred real guilt (Romans 5:12-19). Underneath that culpable act, and giving it its shape, lay the deeper thing this book traces: the relocation of trust and rule from God to the self.

This is the war. And it is being fought in a territory most of the church has never been able to see, let alone aim at.

The Closed Loop

There is a system. And it is a closed loop.

The system produces an experience that feels like transformation. The experience fades. The person returns for another dose. The system is sustained not by the fruit of genuine transformation, genuine formation, but by the appetite it creates and repeatedly partially satisfies.

And the genius of it, if you can call it that, is that it's entirely sincere. Nobody is running a con. The pastor believes. The congregation believes. The worship team believes.

The sincerity doesn't change the architecture.

Self can sit on the throne in a room full of sincere people.

That's what makes it so hard to name. And so hard to break.

Where Your Treasure Is

Jesus said: Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Most people read this backwards, they assume the heart chooses the treasure, that desire leads and value follows.

On one legitimate reading, the system assigns value and meaning to things first, through years of experience, wound, attachment, and formation by flesh, world, and devil, and then the heart coalesces around what has already been valued. The heart is shaped by formation as loves flow in, and then it governs what flows out (Proverbs 4:23).

This is why a person can know the truth and not be transformed by it. In English, knowing is cognitive assent, I have decided something is true. But in its relational uses, Scripture's language of knowing can mean far more than assent to information; the same word can name the intimacy between husband and wife. Read in context, it is transformation through sustained encounter.

The entire English-speaking church has been operating with a flat epistemology, believing that if we give people true information clearly enough, they will change. But real knowing happens below the line. And below the line is where formation actually has to go.

The Mirror We Cannot See

There is one more consequence of a below-the-line structure built by self, world, and devil: Scripture becomes unrelatable.

Peter becomes a historical figure rather than a mirror. Martha becomes a cautionary tale rather than a self-portrait. Elijah under the broom tree becomes ancient biography rather than the most precise description of pastoral burnout ever written. The men and women of Scripture, whose formation stories are the most accurate diagnostic tools ever given to the church, are filtered out before they can land.

Because what is sitting below the line is actively telling the person: that is not me. That doesn't apply. This doesn't work for someone like me.

The sub-cognitive structure filters the Word before the Word can reach the sub-cognitive structure. That is the trap. And no above-the-line tool can break it.

The Way Back

You cannot talk a person out of something they behaved themselves into. You cannot preach them out of a sub-cognitive structure formed through decades of lived practice.

The mind must be renewed, not just informed. And the renewing of the mind that Paul describes in Romans 12 is not a metaphor. It is the mechanics of actual below-the-line transformation: the progressive displacement of a formation built by flesh, world, and devil with a formation built by the Spirit of God.

The way back is the way in, embodied, repeated, directional practice over time, aimed precisely at the level where the formation actually happened. You practice your way in. You practice your way back.

But to aim the practice there, you first have to know where the throne is, who is sitting on it, and how deeply the occupation has gone.

Kingdom Alignment Labs exists to answer one question:

What is actually happening below the line in this person, and what would it take to get them all the way home?

The real question is whether the throne has actually changed hands to Christ, or whether the person has simply gotten better at the Sunday experience while self is still sitting on the throne.

It gives pastors and counselors what they have never had: a way to see what Zacchaeus feels on the inside. What Martha actually needs. What Elijah requires under the broom tree. A map of the territory beneath the territory, and a way to aim the formation work where it has always needed to go.

Not above the line. Below it. Where the real war is. Where the real work has always needed to happen.

Behind every person you have ever shepherded is a territory you could see into but never fully map. Behind every marriage you have counseled, every leader you have restored, every broken person who sat across from you, there was something below the surface driving everything you could see.

This is about that territory.

Kingdom Alignment Labs

The Principle

φθείρω phtheiro · μεταλλάσσω metallasso · to corrupt what was good, to exchange it for its counterfeit

2 Corinthians 11:3, NKJV

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Distortion is never an original evil. It is always a good, bent

The Corrupted Good

There is one principle that orders everything that follows, and it must be seen clearly or the whole system will be misread. Evil is not creative. It makes nothing. It only bends what God has already made good. Every distortion in a human being is a gift turned, a strength driven past its center, a good desire aimed at the wrong object. The enemy rarely creates new desires; he distorts the gifts God already gave. This is why redemption is possible at all: because underneath every bend there is still a good thing that can be straightened.

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.

Genesis 1:31, NKJV

Solomon names the whole movement in a single line, the upright design first and the schemes after, and the schemes are always the upright thing bent.

Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

Ecclesiastes 7:29, NKJV

Everything Remained, Everything Bent

When the fall came, nothing was subtracted from the human being. The person kept every faculty, every capacity, every gift. What changed was direction. The same power to love now loves the wrong things; the same mind

that was made to know God now knows apart from Him; the same drive that was made to fill the earth now devours it. Nothing was removed. Everything was turned. This is why a person's worst patterns are almost always their best gifts running backward: responsibility becomes burden, discernment becomes suspicion, leadership becomes control, compassion becomes exhaustion. Read the bend carefully and you can always find the gift underneath it.

This is not to say the Fall left human nature untouched but merely misdirected. The nature itself was corrupted and enslaved, spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 8:7-8), which is precisely why a person cannot simply redirect themselves and must be born again. What was not lost is the image itself (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9), bent under sin but real, and therefore restorable. The Eastern church has long named this an ancestral corruption of the nature; I am naming the same reality.

who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

Romans 1:25, NKJV

The Greek metallasso is an exchange, a swap of one thing for another. It is the mechanism of all distortion: the good is not destroyed, it is traded for its counterfeit. Even the desire that led to the first sin was a good desire, the longing to be wise, to see, to be like God, aimed now at seizing what could only be received.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

Genesis 3:6, NKJV

The Method of the Deceiver

Behind the bend there is a bender, and his method is never brute force first; it is always craftiness, a corruption of the mind's simplicity. He does not begin by making a person want evil. He begins by getting a good faculty to serve the self instead of God, and his masterwork is to counterfeit the very best things, appearing himself as light.

And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

2 Corinthians 11:14, NKJV

The deepest bend of all, the one every other distortion runs on, is the self climbing onto the throne, the good and God-given self seizing a place it was never designed to hold. That is the master corruption, and it is developed in its own book. Here it is enough to fix the principle: name any dysfunction honestly and you are looking at a gift that has been bent, a good exchanged for its shadow, and therefore a good that grace can bend back.

James 1:14, 15: But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.

James 1:14, 15, NKJV

Evil creates nothing. It only bends the good.

Which is the whole hope of redemption: what was bent can be straightened, because the good is still there.

II

The Two Kingdoms

βασιλεία basileia · θρόνος thronos · a kingdom, and the throne at the center of it

Colossians 1:13, NKJV

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Two kingdoms, God and the self, and the border runs through the human heart

Two Kingdoms, One Throne

There are only two kingdoms, and every human being lives in one of them. Not two nations, not two philosophies, but two reigns, defined by one question: who sits on the throne. Scripture will not let a person stand in the middle. Either God reigns, and the person receives life from Him, or the self reigns, and the person seizes it. The border between the two does not run across a map. It runs straight through the human heart.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Matthew 6:24, NKJV

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey?

Romans 6:16, NKJV

II.1 The Kingdom of God

In the beginning there was one kingdom, and God was on the throne. Creation is not random; it is spoken into coherence by a voice that defines what is, what is good, and what is bounded. Truth had a direction. It flowed downward. God spoke and the person received, and in receiving, rested. This is

the kingdom of God: God reigns, the person receives, and the whole system is at peace because the throne is occupied by the One who belongs on it.

The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

Psalm 103:19, NKJV

Nor will they say, See here! or See there! For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.

Luke 17:21, NKJV

II.2 The Kingdom of the Self

When authority relocated from God to the self, a second kingdom was born, and it has been running ever since. What follows is that kingdom laid bare, first the throne taken inside the human heart, then the false self built to hold it.

The Throne Inside the Human Heart

Part One built the wall. Part Two goes behind it.

We have established that the self maintains its sovereignty through illusion, through agreement and effort and fruit and understanding and the memory of a past surrender. We have established that the self can clean the outside of the cup while the inside remains unchanged. We have established that the self cannot surrender itself, because the instrument doing the surrendering and the thing that needs to be surrendered are the same.

But we have not yet asked the prior question.

Where did this come from? Why does the self cling to its throne with such tenacity, even inside the life of faith? Why does it adapt and disguise and reinterpret rather than simply step down? What is the self protecting that makes sovereignty feel so essential, so natural, so necessary, so like the only way to live?

The answer is not in psychology, though psychology can describe it. The answer is in Genesis. And it begins not with a behavior, but with a question.