

Genesis & A Biblical Worldview

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, June 24, 2012

Introduction

God

Creation

Man

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Sin

Grace

Culture

Purpose

“Let Us Make Man In Our Image”

When we take up the Bible’s teaching about the value, design and purpose of human beings, we begin to bring the biblical/theistic worldview to bear upon what are currently some of the most heated areas of cultural debate. We might be hesitant to declare the implications of what God has said concerning such controversial and supposedly “settled” issues as “abortion rights”, “death with dignity laws”, “marriage equality”, “human cloning and engineering”, “population and birth control”, or our “ecological footprint” on the planet. But it’s precisely because those subjects touch on the very nature of our humanity that we must understand and faithfully speak-forth God’s truth about them. To fail to do so is to neglect the debt of love we owe to our fellow man, and to fail to be true representatives of Christ in this spiritually rebellious age. As Martin Luther once said; “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest expression every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace, if he flinches at that point.”

One of the areas in which we must be faithful to declare God’s truth is with respect to mankind’s essential nature--and the fundamental dignity and value that this nature gives to each human being above all other aspects of God’s creation. In actual practice, human life has always been shown to be either valued and protected, or cheapened and threatened, in accordance with how the origin of humanity is understood to have occurred. Let’s look again, then, at the story the Bible tells us of the sixth day of God’s work of creation; and particularly consider man’s nature (as “image-bearer” and “dominion-keeper”) with respect to two key relationships . . .

I. THE RELATIONSHIP MANKIND HAS TOWARD THE CREATOR.

A. In Genesis 1:26, the Bible says, “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness . . .” and in verse 27, we’re told, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”¹ And so, the first and most fundamental principle we must declare concerning humankind is that human beings are unique with respect to all of the rest of God’s creation in that they are made in the image of God.

1. How it is that human beings reflect the “image” of their Creator is much debated. One theory has to do with how man possesses attributes that do not appear to be shared with other creatures--such as the capacity for abstract thought, or a moral consciousness, or an appreciation of beauty and logical order, or most of all the ability to have a spiritual relationship with the Creator through worship. Some have called this the “non-corporeal” view of God’s image in man (“corporeal” being a reference to a body). Another view--what many call the “corporeal” view--argues that the human body is designed after capabilities that God possesses. Though He is Spirit, He nevertheless “sees”, and “hears”, and “feels”, and “speaks”. One form of this view also takes into account that the triune God--knowing the end from the beginning--knew that the plan for our redemption would involve the incarnation of the Son of God in a body. This form of the “corporeal”

view holds that man is designed to be an appropriate reflection of what the Son of God would eventually become in time, and would eternally be as a result of His incarnation--that is, in terms of the full dignity of His physical body, His intelligence, His will, His emotion, and His spirit. In other words, Christ is the model for what man would be in his creation, rather than man the model for what Christ would be in His incarnation.

To some degree, the full meaning of the image of God in man remains a mystery. But however this ‘image’ is understood, it affirms man’s infinite value. As Psalm 8:4-5 puts it, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.” Those worldviews that deny the dignity of humankind above all other created things deny their Creator’s own testimony about human dignity--as well as the dignity that Christ Himself forever gave to humanity through the incarnation.

2. The uniqueness of the relationship to man as “made in the image of God” is illustrated in the manner in which God created him. The account of Genesis 2 (which is a complimentary rather than a contradictory account) shows us God’s deep and personal involvement in the creation of man in a way that is dramatically different from any of the other creatures He made. We’re told that “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (2:7; the Hebrew name for man--*adam*--being related to the word that means “ground”); and that He “caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man” (vv. 21-22). Of no other creature--not even the angels--are we told that God created them by hand in this way, and personally breathed His own breath of life into them.
- B. Note also that the full identity of “man” as made in the image of God is declared to involve *both* Eve and Adam. “Man” as such is not fully understood as ‘made in the image of God’ except when it is recognized that--as the Scriptures say--“male and female He created them”. This gives the full dignity of the image of God to woman just as much as to man. Those worldviews that deny the dignity of women in favor of men (or that deny the dignity of men in favor of women) deny what God has declared to be true about humanity as both “man and woman”.
- C. Mankind’s identity and profound value as “made in the image of God” was not lost when Adam fell in sin. In Genesis 9:6--after the flood--Noah and his family were told, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.” We read in James 3 of the dangers of the tongue; and are told in verse 9, “With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.” In other words, man’s immeasurable value remains as true now after the fall as it was at the time of his creation; and each individual must thus be treated with respect as a being worthy of dignity at all stages of life--from the time of conception in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16) all the way to the frailty of old age (Psalm 17:9). This is true even if that individual is a sinner who lives in a way that is utterly inconsistent with his or her essential dignity as an image-bearer of the Creator. Anyone who maliciously attacks any human being for any reason does a dreadful thing; because he dares to lay a malicious hand upon God’s own image.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP HUMANKIND HAS TOWARD THE CREATION.

- A. Man's nature is also shown in the fact that God gave him "dominion" over the rest of creation. After saying "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"; God then went on to say, "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26). After making Adam and Eve, God blessed them and gave them this mandate: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (v. 28). As was true of God's image in man, this mandate also was not lost in the fall. In Genesis 9:1-2, when Noah's family emerged from the Ark, God repeated this mandate to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand." Those worldviews that see humanity as an intrusion on the planet stand in opposition to God's declared mandate to Adam and Eve. But the fact that the first work that God gave to Adam was that of tending the garden shows that his "dominion" role was to be a care-giving one that benefited him and met his needs; and it is consistent with the biblical/theistic worldview to say that human beings are responsible to care for creation respectfully and to use its resources wisely.
- B. The relationship of man over the rest of God's creation is illustrated in that God called Adam to name the others of His creatures. In Genesis 2:19-20, we're told, "Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field." God's commission to name the beasts that He brought to him gave Adam a demonstrable supremacy over them. But more, it also involved the work of careful study on the part of Adam so as to capture their essence in a name. The importance of this to the biblical worldview cannot be overemphasized. "It is probable that we think to little rather than too much of naming as a first step in knowledge. To give names which endure is with few exceptions the prerogative of genius."²² This early task of Adam justifies man's legitimate work of scientific inquiry into the nature and operations of God's creation, his careful management and purposeful use of all the resources God gives him in this created realm, and his joyful reflection of the things that he learns of creation in the arts. As Psalm 111:2 affirms, "The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them." The faithful labors of the scientist, the workman, and the artist, *all* honor God the Creator in their proper domains.

¹All Scripture readings are taken from *the Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

²Bernard Bosanguet, cited in Daniel Sommer Robinson, *The Principles of Reasoning*, 3rd ed. (New York, London: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1947), p. 16.