

Genesis & A Biblical Worldview

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, July 8, 2012

Introduction

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God

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Creation

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Man

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Sin

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Grace

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Culture

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Purpose

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Made for Loving Obedience to God

In our last study, we began to explore how Genesis--the Book of Beginnings--establishes a biblical worldview concerning how we're to understand humankind. In that study, we explored how the Bible presents us with what we might call the "objective" elements of man's essential nature--that, with respect to God the Creator, he is "image-bearer"; and that, with respect to the rest of God's creation, he is "dominion-keeper". These things are true of man at all times and in all conditions--whether he is aware of them or not; or even whether he accepts them or denies them to be true. They are inescapable aspects of his essential being.

This morning, we continue to develop our biblical worldview concerning man by taking up what the second chapter of Genesis tells us; and what we might call the "subjective" elements of man's essential nature--things that he was made for, but that he may or may not conform to. First, we'll see that he is a being made to experience a relationship of love with his Creator; and second, that he was made for obedience to the God who made him for this relationship. As we'll see, the implications of these two affirmations in Scripture are very significant.

I. MAN IS MADE FOR A RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE WITH GOD.

- A. A hint of this essential aspect of man's being has been given to us already in Genesis 1:26. There, we're told, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; 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.'"¹ The "Us" of this verse suggests to us what we know clearly from the greater light of the New Testament--that God, in the essential nature of His being is a Plurality (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); and that the three Divine Persons of the Triune Godhead enjoy an eternal relationship of love. "God is love", we're told in 1 John 4:8; and this is true--not merely in a sentimental sense--but because God is a Trinity of Persons who are in an eternal relationship of love. And just as God is relational in His essential being, and just as God made man in His own image, man too is relational in his essential being. The ultimate goal of God's saving grace is to bring the redeemed man or woman into the overflow of divine love that the Triune God enjoys together forever. As Jesus prayed to the Father for His disciples in John 17,

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:20-24).

Salvation for man is, ultimately, an eternal 'relationship' of love with God. Thus Paul could close one of his letters with the blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the

Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

- B. It's in this light, then, that we should understand the details that are given to us of man's creation in Genesis 2. We're told in in verses 4-6 of how God graciously provided the environment in which man would live and work. Then, in verse 7, we're told, "And 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." This describes man as made in relationship with God in very intimate terms; and in a way that is not said of any other of God's created beings. The first man was made by the very hands of God; and lived with the very breath of life that God breathed into him. Then, we're told of the nurturing nature of this relationship by how God placed man in the environment of life and work that He made for Him (vv. 8-9), and provided for the fruitfulness of that environment (vv. 10-14; see also 1:29-30).
- C. In every respect, man is shown to be a creature that was formed for a unique privilege--a deep, loving, personal relationship with the Creator. It truly *is* as Augustine prayed in his *Confessions*: "Thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee." This means that, in a truly biblical worldview, a relationship with God is not seen as merely an option. To deny ourselves of this relationship is to deny our very humanity--and to deny ourselves of the fulfilling experience for which we were truly made.

II. MAN IS MADE FOR OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDS.

- A. As an important dimension of man's relational nature, we're shown that God immediately began speaking to man in a way that man could understand and respond intelligently to (vv. 15-17). And the very first thing that we're told that God spoke to man--the intelligent, rational, volitional, relational being that was made in the image of God--was a command. In thinking of the Genesis story, we should place the command that God gave to Adam in Genesis 2:15-17 as first in chronological order; where we're told, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" We're not told that God, at that time, commanded Adam to tend and keep the garden; but in Genesis 1:28--after God made the woman from the man--we're told that God told them, "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." So, when God made the man, He gave him a command; and when He made the woman from the man and brought them together, He gave them both another command.
- B. Relationship with the Creator and obedience to the Creator are--almost immediately--shown to be tied together in an inseparable bond. When God said that man would "surely die" on the day that he disobeyed God's command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil", we're later shown the relational nature of that death in that man sought to hide from God after disobeying Him (Genesis 3:8-9). God had to call out to him, "Where are you?" What's more, Adam's relationship with the woman was also affected (see 3:12). Disobedience brought about "death"; and that death is presented in the Genesis story as a severing of relationship with God and fellow man--later to be followed by physical death. Just as relationship with God is an essential part of our created nature, so is obedience to God; and disobedience to God brings about a severing of relationship.
- C. To live in obedience to God's commandments is no more restrictive of our freedom than running on the tracks is restrictive to a train. A train is designed to run on tracks; and it is most 'free' when it does so. Likewise,

human beings are designed to live in obedience to God; and they are happiest when they do so. As the psalmist puts it, "Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments" (Psalm 112:1). To live in rebellion against God's commandments is not "freedom". It is to rebel against one's very design . . . and to one's own hurt.

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These two essential aspects of man's created design--that he was made both for relationship with God and obedience to God--are what underlay the message of the Gospel. We are made for a relationship with our Creator; and our innermost being cannot but yearn for that for which we were made. And yet, sin through disobedience has broken that relationship; so that we are alienated from the God who made us for Himself, and are in a state of rebellion against His commands.

But God has taken the initiative to restore the relationship by sending His Son --sending Him, in fact, to be in so close a relationship with us that He has taken full humanity to Himself through the incarnation, and has forever become one of us. Jesus, the God/Man, lived in perfect obedience to the Father's commandments, and atoned for our sins in His own body on the cross.

The two key notes of the gospel, then, are "reconciliation" (answering to relationship), and "belief" (answering to obedience). As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21;

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

And as Jesus Himself has declared, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29).

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