

THE GLORY AND THE MISERY OF MAN

by Ray C. Stedman

We are examining now the sixth day of creation, the day when man appeared upon the earth. In looking into the meaning of these verses we are attempting to discover the nature of man. You will, of course, recognize how important that is. We will never understand what is going on in human life -- in the world or in our private individual lives -- unless we understand the nature of man and ask ourselves the question, What is man?

The German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, used to love to take long walks of a summer evening, meditating and thinking. On one occasion he was seated in a park when a suspicious policeman noticed that he had been there for several hours. The policeman came up to him and said, "What are you doing?" The philosopher replied, "I'm thinking." The policeman said, "Who are you?" Kant said, "That's precisely the problem I've been thinking about. 'Who am I?'" It was this same philosopher who proposed that life could be reduced to four basic questions: What can I know? What ought I do? What may I hope? What is man, or Who am I? This is the question that comes before us as we look at this sixth day of the creative week in Genesis 1: What is man?

The other day I saw a drunken young man. His hair was mussed and in disarray, his eyes were wild and bleary, he walked with a staggering step, and his speech was thick and blurred. When I saw him, two quotations flashed into my mind. One was that very well known one, "There, but for the grace of God, go I," and the other was a fragment from the poem by Edwin Markham, *The Man with the Hoe*:

Is this the thing the Lord God made, and gave
To have dominion over sea and land,
To trace the stars, and search the heavens for power
And feel the passion of eternity?

You cannot look at man in his degradation but what you are struck immediately by the contrast between what man could be and what man is. As G.K. Chesterton (who was a kind of 19th-century C.S. Lewis) once said, "What ever else is true of man, it is certainly true that man is not what he was meant to be."

What was that? What was man meant to be? What were you meant to be? In the fulfillment of God's intention for you, what was meant to be? Let us look at it in Genesis 1, Verses 27 and 28.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." {Gen 1:27-28 RSV}

The heart of that pronouncement is the words introducing the verse, "God created man in his own image..." God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," {Gen 1:26a RSV}. The key phrase is, "the image and likeness of God." Notice that this was never said of any other creature, never said of any animal, bird, fish or plant. This is the glory and the dignity of man, that at the beginning he was made in the image and likeness of God.

The first question that suggests itself to any thinking mind at this point is, What is that image? How does it appear in us? Of what does the image of God in man consist? Is it visible or invisible? Is it physical or immaterial? Is it the body, the soul, or the spirit?

The Mormons (among others) teach that the image of God in man is the body of man; that is what is made after the image of God. They base this upon certain anthropomorphic expressions in the Scripture, those

expressions which seem to impute human features to God, e.g., the eyes of God, the fingers of God, the hands of God, etc. The Mormons take these literally and say they prove that God does indeed have a body like our body. This is fundamental to the teachings of the Mormon faith. They fail to see that they are really turning the whole issue around and saying that it is God who is made in the image of man.

If, in this sense man, is in the image of God, then it is also true that apes and monkeys are made in the image of God, because bodily they look very much like us. I know some people I could refer to who are proof of that! But if we are saying that God has a body, we also must ask, what kind of a body? What does it look like? What color eyes does God have? What kind of hair: is it long, like a man's hair; or short, like a woman's? What is the color of his skin? Is it black or yellow or brown or what? What does God look like? You only need to ask questions like this to see how absurd is this whole proposition that God has a body like ours. Anyone who is acquainted at all with the Scripture in depth knows that it specifically denies this about God. He does not have a body.

Then what is the image of God in man? Is it the soul of man? Is it because we are able to function on the level of the rational that we are like God? Is it because we are able to feel, to sense, to have emotional reactions? Is it because we have the faculty of volition and can choose and make decisions? These are the functions of the soul; and it is true that God also does these things. He thinks, he reasons, he feels, he reacts, he chooses, he decides. But if this is also true of God, it is likewise true of the animals. As we have already seen, they function in the same way though to a lesser degree. There is nothing distinctive about his soul that marks man as different from the animals. We cannot find the image of God there.

The last choice is the spirit of man, and here we do find something unique. No other creature of God, in this earthly realm, has a spirit, or more accurately, is a spirit. We are told specifically by the Lord Jesus in that remarkable account of his meeting with the woman of Samaria at the well, "God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth," {John 4:24}. Here was a poor, worldly woman, who had no education and evidently was not trained in theological matters, yet to her he imparted this great truth. Again, after the resurrection, appearing to his disciples, he identified his resurrected body as the one that had been crucified and laid in the grave, then he said to them, "a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see me have," {cf, Luke 24:39}. That is, a spirit can exist without a body, and God is Spirit.

Thus it is this that marks the image of God in man. Man, likewise, is spirit. This is the basic, fundamental nature of man. I have a body in which I live, much as I would live in a tent or house. When the apostles speak of leaving the body they speak of departing from it as one would from a house. I also have a soul by which I function on the levels of rational, volitional and emotional experience. But I am a spirit. That is the fundamental me, the fundamental you, we are spirits. Because we are spirits, dwelling in bodies (at least in our present stage of existence), it is a mistake to identify ourselves with our bodies, or even our soul's reactions. Fundamentally we are spirits, invisible, unseen by one another, and yet expressing ourselves through the avenues of the body and the soul. I personally am delighted that you brought your body with you this morning and that you did not come in spirit only, as some people say they attend church. It is comforting to me that you came enclosed in a body, but fundamentally you are a spirit, an invisible spirit, and that spirit is the image of God.

Now what is Godlike about our spirit? The spirit is made in the image of God, and, if so, then it can do things that God can do but no animal can. What are those faculties of spirit? Let me suggest three of them, at least. Perhaps there are others but I want to mention three. First, there is creativity. Throughout this chapter we have been reading, "God made... God created... God formed... God fashioned." That kind of activity involves imagination, the ability to think in conceptual terms, i.e., abstract thinking, the ability to see a thing with the eye of the mind and then fashion it with whatever powers are available. This great faculty man shares with God. Man too is creative. Not to the same degree that God is, for we cannot make things out of nothing, as God does, but we can fashion things, make things. Man can compose a symphony or design a computer, he can paint a picture and plan a building, he can even devise a new recipe. A baby can stack blocks on the floor and make a playhouse and, in imagination, enter it and live in it. No animal can do this. Man has the function of creativity because he is made in the image of God. This is the dignity of mankind that separates him, by a vast gulf, from the whole animal creation.

Second, God communicates. He speaks, and so does man. Man is the only creature that can talk. Perhaps some are saying that animals also can communicate with one another. Animals do make sounds, but they do not communicate, they do not speak, as we use that term. They do not use language. They have certain signals which they utter and which are mutually understandable. But they do not convey ideas, they do not discuss matters together, they do not talk over an issue as we do. This ability is reserved for man.

Again, throughout this whole section, we have found that the universe sprang into being because God speaks. It is the word of God which forms the ages, says the writer to the Hebrews. God uses words as power, which alters, changes, and affects events and people. This too is the way man speaks. We alone of all created beings on the earth are able to appreciate the power of a word and to use it to alter lives or to shape history. Someone once asked, "What are the three sweetest words in the English language?" To this he received three replies. A married man said the three sweetest words were "Home, sweet home." A banker said the three sweetest words were "Enclosed find check." But a young man said they are, "I love you." We appreciate that story because we understand the power of words. We know how words can affect us and change us. Words can wreck lives, they can heal and harm, injure and restore. What an amazing faculty is speech! It is part of the image of God in man.

Third, in this chapter, we have found that God is always pronouncing things good. He is therefore a moral being, and man shares that character as well. Man, too, is a moral being. He has the faculty of being able to distinguish between evil and good. Remarkably enough, even in societies where there is a denial of morals, as in the relativistic society of today, men still go on pronouncing things good or evil. The standards may vary but the result remains: some things are called good and other things bad. This practice is found universally among men. Everywhere man has a consciousness of moral values. We feel the gnawing of a bad conscience when it sits in judgment over us. Even though we try to stifle it, it keeps insinuating itself upon us and we cannot get away from it. We recognize moral choices and moral values, and this marks us as having been made in the image of God.

Now with these three remarkable faculties: the ability to create (with all man's wonderful inventiveness involved in that); the ability to communicate (to share ideas which affect, and infect, others), and the divine ability to treat certain things as bad and others as good, man was told to do two specific things. The command came, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (that is one command, given in three different ways). Second, he was told to subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. Man was given the task of filling up the earth; and second, to rule it, to govern it, by exercising dominion over everything within the earth; to subdue its forces, to master them and bring them all under his control and direction. The whole course of history is simply the record of man's attempt to fulfill these divine injunctions. As a race we have never forgotten these commands and have been engaged in doing them ever since.

But what have been the results? The interesting thing is that the fulfilling of these divine commands, given man at the earliest dawn of history, has produced results which are utterly disastrous. To illustrate, this past month there appeared in the papers the accounts of two remarkable speeches given by Stanford professors. Both of the men were reporting on the prospects of the twenty-first century and both were fearfully pessimistic, though they were writing from two quite different points of view. One of them, Prof. Ehrlich, pointed out that there is no solution in sight for the population explosion. Speaking on this very matter of multiplying and filling the earth, he declared that this has essentially been done, the earth is filled. If we go much further we shall only succeed in destroying man from the face of the earth. He saw no hope for the solving of this problem.

The other man, Dr. North, commented on the situation now prevailing in the realm of international events and international morality, especially in view of international warfare. He, likewise, could see no hope in the matter of man's commission to rule and govern the earth. Everything has gone a-kilter and Dr. North painted a dark and pessimistic picture. Both men, in one way or another, were saying, "We don't think there will be a twenty-first century."

What has gone wrong with this image of God in man? Man retains the image of God, but now the creature who is called "God's glory" has become God's shame. Men behave as children, without reason, irrationally. As someone has well put it, "Our problem seems to be that we're suffering from a prolonged adolescence

merging into a premature senility." Why is this? For an answer let us examine the second word that is used in Verse 26: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." God made man in his image but also after his likeness. Well, you ask, what is the difference between image and likeness? Aren't these the same thing? No, they are closely related, but they are not the same thing.

The image, as we have already seen, is the existence of man as a spirit. It is the equipment that God has given us, the capacity to be godlike. The likeness is the proper functioning of that equipment. It raises the question of whether man is actually godlike or merely has the capacity to be so. As he was made in the beginning, man was both in the image and after the likeness of God. Thus when Adam was formed by the Creator he stood before God as a spirit dwelling in a body, exercising the functions of a soul. He had the ability to be creative, to communicate, and to make moral choices. But he not only had the ability to do so, he was actually doing it. He was exercising the function of godlikeness. You may have a watch which has the ability to keep time, but the question is, does it actually do it? In many cases, the answer is no, it doesn't. It has lost its proper functioning. So man retains the capacity to be godlike but has totally lost the ability to actually manifest godlikeness. But man was not only made to be godlike, he was Godlike, in the beginning.

The secret, as we learn from the rest of Scripture, lay in an inner dependence that continually repudiated self confidence. This is the hard lesson for us to learn. How confident we are in ourselves. How sure we are that if we set our mind on something we can do it. If we are motivated enough to obtain a thing, all we have to do is to mobilize our resources, set our jaws, clench our fists and move to it and we will get it done. That is the false self-confidence that has been the ruin of the human race. But the principle of godlikeness is the repudiation of that self-confidence and a resting on the working of Another who dwells within. That is what Adam knew. That is the way he functioned, and thus fulfilled his manhood and manifested the likeness of God.

If you want to see this in history, read the record of the Gospels concerning the Lord Jesus. See him stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee with but a word, "Peace, be still," {Mark 4:39}. See him walking on the water in the middle of the storm, to the concern and fright of the disciples. Watch him changing the water, instantly, into wine. How does he do these things? Is it because he is the Son of God? Is it because he is the Creator that he can do this? No, he himself denied that. He said it was not because he was God the Son that he did these things. He said, "The Son can do nothing of himself," {John 5:19 KJV}. "The words that I speak unto you," he said repeatedly, "are not my words. The works that I do are not my works." "The Father who dwells in me, he does the works," {John 14:10 RSV}. All is done out of a reliance upon the work of the Father indwelling him. He knew the secret of manhood, the lost secret of humanity. What this world has forgotten and is vainly groping and seeking after, what every course in psychology is hoping to find, what every self-improvement program is attempting to realize but never can, this lost secret of how man was intended to operate, he knew. The likeness of God is lost. That is why man can create, but everything he creates has a twist toward evil. That is why he can communicate, but not only does he communicate truth and beauty, but also lust and hate and filth and bigotry and death. That is why, though he still knows moral values, he denies them and rationalizes them to exalt evil, just as the last verse of Romans 1 describes; men who not only do evil things but delight in watching others do the same things {cf, Rom 1:32}.

It is here where the gospel comes in. Let me read you one wonderful verse in Colossians, where the apostle Paul shows us the plan of God to counteract the fall of man. In Chapter 3, Verses 9 and 10, he says to the Christians,

"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." {Col 3:9-10 RSV}

There is the likeness of God, being restored in man. The image of God has never been lost, for man still retains the capacity to be godlike but he has no longer the ability -- until Jesus Christ is restored to the human heart. When he enters there begins a process which, little by little, step by step, day by day, through trial and heartache, sorrow, disappointment and judgment, through glory and blessing and thrilling experiences of grace, is changing us so as to reproduce in us the likeness of God once again. Thus we not only have the capacity to be Godlike, we are actually becoming Godlike. Is that not glorious? That is what God is after. Being renewed in knowledge is the restoration of the likeness of God.

This is why Jesus said to the woman at the well, "God is Spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit [in the image of God] and in truth" [in the likeness of God] {John 4:24 RSV}. Remember also that verse in Second Corinthians where Paul says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord [that is, seeing the face of the Lord Jesus through the experiences of our life, in the nitty-gritty and hurly-burly of life, through the humdrum routines of life, in the high points and the low spots], are being changed from glory to glory [from stage to stage] into the same image, by the Spirit of the Lord," {cf, 2 Cor 3:18 KJV}. That is the process of restoring the likeness of God in man.

Finally, do you remember that verse in First John 3, "...but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," {1 Jn 3:2b RSV}. There is a wonderful picture in the Old Testament book of Malachi. In chapter 3, Malachi says that God sits as a refiner and purifier of silver {see, Mal 3:2b-3}. He puts the silver in the firing pot and builds a hot fire under it. As the silver melts the dross begins to float to the surface. The silversmith sits and skims it off throwing away the dross as it arises. From time to time he bends over and looks into the pot. What is he looking for? The reflection of his own image. When he can see his likeness in the silver he knows that it is pure.

Does that not explain something about life to us? This is what God is doing with us. Why do we go through these crushing disappointments, these wrenching heartaches, these hard trials, these pressures, these tribulations, these temptations, these times of failure, as well as times of joy, blessing, glory and ecstasy in the Lord? What is he doing to us? He is refining the silver until he can see his likeness again. Remember that the dream of God has been to have a world filled with little Christs, each of them like his Son. Through all the Scripture we have this hope set before us. We who have come to Jesus Christ are predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son {Rom 8:29}, to bear his likeness in whatever degree we permit him to work in us and through us now. Let us hold that in mind as we face life and face these realities. That which was God's glory became God's shame. But that which is now God's shame, which is about the bring the world crashing down around him, like Samson in the temple at Gaza, can become and is becoming, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, step by step: first, God's child, then God's partner, then God's friend, and finally, God's glory. May God grant that this will be the experience of each of us.

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