



new creation teaching ministry: tuesday night studies 2009

## the things we firmly believe

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### Study 6: Man<sup>1</sup> in Creation and Fall (TTWFB, chh. 10-13, pp. 72-87)

#### What Is A Human Being?

‘It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.’<sup>2</sup> We cannot know the truth of what a human being is unless we first know God, for the basic truth of us as human beings is that we are made in the image of God for relationship with God. As we have seen knowing God is grounded in humility, and so also then is our understanding of ourselves. A true understanding of ourselves requires us to not be self-absorbed! Pride is the puffing up of a person, and only humility actually enables us to see our ‘real shape.’

The greatest difficulty in understanding the truth of humanity is our refusal of the truth of God (Rom. 1:18ff). This refusal has led to a bias against God and so a distorting of His image, both in our concept of it, as well as in our living out of it. Our anthropology (understanding of humanity) will be inadequate without reference to the Scripture and the work of the Spirit in the hearing of those Scriptures to bring that truth not just to our minds but also to claim our wills and hearts.

Man is to be understood in five categories or states from the beginning of God’s work in history to the end: Man created; Man fallen; Man redeemed; Man in sanctification; Man glorified.

#### Man Created

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?  
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.  
You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet:  
all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.  
O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psa. 8:3-9)

There is nothing demeaning in David’s question, ‘What is man that you are mindful of him?’ Created Man is truly a wonder in the world.

#### 1. Created by and for the Word of God

Our creation—as with the rest of creation—came by the word of God (Gen. 1:1-2, 26ff). Only with the man and the woman in the creation though is there any conversation, which involves the

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<sup>1</sup> Geoff Bingham uses ‘Man’ with a capital M to include all male and female members of the human race in its totality, and he generally (though not always) uses ‘man’ with a lower case m to speak of a male member of the human race. This usage is grounded in an understanding of the ordering of male-female relationships according to the Word of God. We will follow Geoff’s use in this way.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, 1.1.2, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. XX, ed. John T. McNeill Westminster, Philadelphia 1960, p. 37

impartation of a commission (1:28) and the granting of provision (1:29). Human beings must be understood as essentially as hearers and doers of God's word.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Created as one race in polarities

In Genesis 2:21ff the Lord God made Eve from a rib of Adam. This partner and fitting helper for him was deeply connected to him, and one with him—as he recognised in his cry, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!' Acts 17:26 shows that all the nations of the earth have been made by God from one ancestor (i.e. Adam). In Romans 5:12ff we see some of the dreadful implications of this deep connectedness with Adam for us all after the temptation of, and sinning by, our first parents.

Part of what this means is that each of us is essentially a 'person-in-communion'. All men and women, and all the ethnic and political groupings of people, cannot really understand themselves or be themselves in isolation, or in opposition to one another.

## 3. Created as contingent / dependent

Jeremiah 10:23—'I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; It is not for man to direct his steps.' 'Man is only true as he correlates with God as his Creator, his Father and his King.'<sup>4</sup> We have no identity in isolation. Our affinity with God is from being in His image. Should we ever try to move outside of this dependency (as in fact we have done so in the sinning of our forefather Adam) we go against what it really means to be Man.

## 4. Created in the image of God

This is clearly seen in Genesis 1:26ff, 5:1-2, and 9:1ff. (See also 1Cor. 11:7; Psa. 8:3ff; Ecc. 3:11; 7:29.) In the Godhead we have seen the mutuality of the Father, Son and Spirit, and human beings reflect this in two ways:

(a) internally: each created person is content to be who he or she is, and to be that fully; using all gifts without jealousy, by serving and giving to others; and without envy, resenting and desiring the gifts of others; and

(b) externally, in that each is inter-related socially with all other mankind.

'Being in the image of God' is another way of speaking of us being created to share in the communicable attributes of God; His holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness and love. Scripture talks of God being love and light. In dependency on God (not from ourselves) Man must also be in the flow of these realities (for we are never—*in and of ourselves*—love or light, even without sin).

## 5. Created with vocation

The man and the woman were given a task (Gen. 1:28) of being fruitful and multiplying, to bring the earth to completion and perfection, subduing all its dynamism in the service of God, and in all this to have lordship over all placed in their rule. This was a ministry of being prophet, priest and king.

God is Father, Creator and King, and human beings are sons and daughters, creatures and servants. These categories are *relational* and *moral*. We have *affinity* with God and *responsibility* towards Him. Human beings as created are not made for passivity, but for active obedience and a willing heart to God.

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<sup>3</sup> In Leviticus 8 when Aaron was ordained as high priest, he had blood smeared on his right ear lobe, his right thumb and his right big toe. Ear=hearing; thumb=hand/doing; toe=foot/going. The holiness of Aaron was to be shown in his hearing of God's word and then his doing of that word wherever the Lord took him. In many ways that is the model found for Adam who was the first high priest in creation.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, *The Things We Firmly Believe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., NCPI, Blackwood, 1986, p. 73

## Man Tempted, Sinning And Fallen

There is no rational explanation for the sin of the first couple. There was no defect in them—created as very good—nor in the LORD’s provision for them by command or by gift. Eden was a place of delight and in the centre was the tree of life, available to the man and the woman. Why they fell for Satan’s deception and way of working is a mystery—‘the mystery of iniquity’—and we must be careful not to ascribe reasons to it but rather just describe it. Reasons always end in a justification of the sin. The temptation involved the serpent casting doubt upon the wisdom and goodness of God, and sought to separate the man and the woman from dependency on God. It involved their denying their essentially contingent humanity and seeking a kind of divinity—being ‘as God’ not ‘like God’ where they define (‘know’) good and evil, not learning these things from the Word of God.

The results of the Fall are immediate. ‘...when you eat of it, you shall surely die’ (Gen. 2:17). This death was a death in relationship with God, and so was also a death in the reality of true human life. Man came alive to Himself and to imagined possibilities for Himself, but in so doing actually died. Now, rather than hearing and responding to the Word of God, Man seeks to evade the encounter with God and must be dragged out of hiding to hear this Word (Gen. 3:8-10). The unity of the man and woman is wrecked by guilt and they become accusing and blaming towards one another (Gen. 3:11-12). The internal contentment is wrecked and Man becomes ashamed of Himself (Gen. 3:7).

Man cannot live without love and worship, and Acts 17:24-28 and Romans 1:20ff show that having rejected and opposed God, He finds Himself now thrust innately towards substitute loves, substitute objects of worship. (Religion has its birth in the rejection of God; it is the twin sister of unbelief!) This in its turn is faced by God’s opposition and this leads to a terrible spiralling down, so that finally Man operates against all the holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness and love in which He was made to participate (Rom. 1:24-32). Included in this is a twisting and perverting of the love-in-polarity needed to truly express our humanity, so that human sexuality, given to be the place of expressing this reality most deeply, becomes impure, degrading (Rom. 1:24—in heterosexual situations) and shameful, unnatural, indecent (Rom. 1:26-27—in homosexual situations). Man also refused his vocation in the fall, and so we can trace his refusal to fill the earth (the building of the tower of Babel and of cities as citadels against God—Gen. 4:17; 10:8-11; 11:1ff.)

In all this, the image of God has not been erased. In fact the terrible depths of human evil are so deep and terrible *because* of the image of God, which now operates in reverse. ‘The very gifts of will, personhood, natural gifts, intelligence and the like, which have come to him from God—including the very image of God that he is—he uses perversely. In so doing he is further enslaved, more deeply entrenched in evil.’<sup>5</sup>

## The Nature Of Sin

This situation is universal—‘There is no one righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:10-20, 23). Man is born in sin; sinful from the very beginning of existence, and not simply becoming sinful through sinful acts (Psa. 51:5; Rom. 5:12-14; Eph. 2:3). In the Bible we do find early on that there are those who—like Abel, Seth and Noah—are righteous, and children of God, but they are this only by the action of God in grace. All fallen mankind is doomed to death apart from the grace of God.

In speaking of sin’s universality and of the works that come from sin, we are not saying that all human beings do everything stated in these Scriptures (e.g. Rom. 1:18–32, Mark 7:20–23). The truth

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<sup>5</sup> Bingham, p. 83

is that Man does do all these things *as a race* and also that the seed of these things may be found to be lurking in every human heart.<sup>6</sup>

Some descriptions of sin in the Scriptures are:

- *Falling short of the mark* (Rom. 3:23). The ‘mark’ is the glory of God, i.e. full participation in the image and likeness of God for what God created us.
- *Lawlessness* (1John 3:4). Lawlessness is refusing the obedience to God that He calls for from us in giving us His law and commandments, and in fact doing the opposite.
- *‘Omission’* (Jas. 4:17). This is knowing what should be done and refusing to do it, a particular kind of lawlessness.
- *Faithlessness / unbelief* (John 16:7-11). Faith is not only trust and belief but also obedience, a wholehearted committing of oneself to action in expression of that trust.

Human beings are not lone agents in the matter of sin. ‘Satan, his world of evil powers, and in fact every evil force conspire to draw man more deeply into sin. This complex system which involves human “flesh” (i.e. human fallenness) is a bloc always opposing God.’<sup>7</sup> For this reason sin holds human beings in a dreadful grip; it is portrayed in the Bible as a power (see John 8:34; Rom. 6:12-23). As well as these powers that are evil, people are held in bondage too by God Himself, His Law and His wrath and their own guilty consciences in the face of God. All these things are used by Satan also to bring further fear and bondage into play.

No human being is merely helpless in this; we are responsible for having come under these powers. The guilt and pollution of sin, for which we are responsible, are the means of our enslavement. Hebrews 2:14-15 shows that all of our lives we live under fear of judgment that follows death, and that Satan uses that fear to hold us in bondage. We often hate the bondages under which we find ourselves, and even use our powers to seek to liberate ourselves, but we’re unable. We are indeed the slaves of evil.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Sinner’s Dilemma**

This dilemma lies in the fact that we are fallen, distant from God, in rebellion to Him, dead because of our sin, and worthy of judgment. The problems we have are:

1. *We are far gone from God, but do not know how far.* We are sinful but do not how radical our sinfulness is—that even our good bits are bad.
2. *We have no desire to hear God and obey Him.* Even though God is revealing Himself to us daily.
3. *We do not know the nature of the God whom we reject.* If we did, we would be shocked to our core, for then we would see the true nature of our dilemma.
4. *Morally and spiritually we are weak.* We cannot operate in these areas unaided, and if not by God, we will be energised by other powers, even unconsciously on our part. Changing our moral and spiritual state is beyond us; it is a work that must be done upon us. Telling the Law will not do this.
5. *We cannot justify ourselves by good works.* We foolishly think that we can do such works, but do not see how shameful they in fact are.

Only a deep work of salvation by God Himself can rescue us from our terrible dilemma.

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<sup>6</sup> What a person does in his or her mind and heart is generally known only to that person, and even may not be so clear to him or her, given the ability of the human heart and mind to rationalise and hide our sinfulness—this is what is meant when David speaks about the inner parts and inmost place in Psa. 51:9.

<sup>7</sup> Bingham, p. 80

<sup>8</sup> Bingham, p. 83