

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Thinking Biblically Part 4: Man as the Image of God

By John W. Robbins

Editor's note: The content of this Review is taken from lecture 5 of Dr. John W. Robbins series on Thinking Biblically, "Man as the Image of God." It has been transcribed and edited for print. Thinking Biblically: A Challenge to Christians will be published in book form in 2021 Lord willing. Unless otherwise noted Scripture references are from the King James Version.

The Creation of Man

We leave the doctrine of God and move on to the doctrine of man as the image of God. We begin by surveying *Genesis* 1:1-25.

Verses 1-3:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. *And God said*, Let there be light: and there was light.

Verse 6:

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

Verse 9:

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

These verses contain the phrase *And* [Then in NKJV] *God said*. The verses between these contain

the phrase *God called*. Not only did God *create* by his Word, he also *named* his creations. The notion that words are inadequate is silly. Words are entirely sufficient for God to create the universe, to name his creations, and to reveal truth.

Verse 11:

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass....

Verse 14:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven....

Verse 20:

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth....

Verse 24:

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature....

Finally, we arrive at the account of the creation of man in verses 26-27:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

The Basis of Civil Government

That is the doctrine of the creation of man. One of the very practical implications of this doctrine is in *Genesis 9:6 NKJV*. “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.” This idea that man is the image of God is the basis of civil government and in this specific case, of capital punishment. An attack on man is implicitly an attack on God. One who sheds another man’s blood is impugning God, and the punishment is death.

The Image of God

Now we will look at several more verses that will help us to determine what constitutes the image of God. *Genesis 2:7*, “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 soul.”

Job 32:8, “But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.”

Job 33:4 repeats this idea, “The spirit of God hath made me, And the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.”

Proverbs 20:27 NKJV, “The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart.”

This is the same idea we have found in *John 1* where Christ is the light that lights every man. The simple statement in *Genesis* is that man is created in God’s image. The Roman Catholic Church-State has invented a distinction between the terms *image* and *likeness*. We will not study their view other than to mention it. The terms *image* and *likeness* are used interchangeably, and in *Genesis 1:26* both terms are used for emphasis.

What we need to ask is, *What exactly is this image?* Different theologians have given different answers to this question. Many theologians have thought that it is man’s body, or some aspect of his body. Man has a prehensile thumb—his thumb can touch the tips of the other fingers of the same hand—a rather unique ability among God’s creatures. Some

theologians have suggested that the image is things like this. Some have suggested that the image consists in man’s ability to walk upright.

One of Karl Barth’s views is that sex is the image of God because it says in *Genesis 1:27 NKJV*, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” So, Barth jumps to the conclusion that the image of God is actually sex. All of these views are wrong and for the same reason. God does not have a body, therefore the body or any aspect of it cannot be the image of God. The image has to be something else, and we have seen in the verses we have quoted, what that something else is.

One other view that the Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof (1873–1957), and some Reconstructionists have held is that the image is dominion. After all, the LORD God has dominion over the entire universe, and man as his image has dominion over the Earth. They say the image is dominion. To see what is wrong with that idea we must look at the *Genesis 1:26-28 NKJV* with the question in mind, Is the image dominion? Beginning with verses 26 and 27, “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.’” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” It certainly mentions dominion, but it also mentions sex as Karl Barth pointed out. So we continue reading in verse 28, “Then God blessed them, and God said to 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.’” The answer is in verse 28. Man is already created, and he is already the image, and this is before he is given dominion. He is given dominion because he is the image already. He does not become the image as a result of being given dominion. The dominion cannot be the image.

The Status and Dignity of Man

Now that we have eliminated all aspects of the body as the image, and the function of dominion as

Berkhof suggests, there is not much else. We are left with the soul or the mind, and we will look at a few more verses in this regard. We begin with *Psalm 8*:

O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies, that thou mightiest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

There is a common misunderstanding of this passage that the Psalmist is putting down man, but that is not his intention at all. Some people understand verse 3 to mean that the Psalmist is comparing puny man to the wonderful heavens, but that is not the case. He is saying the exact opposite here. He is saying, *I have considered Your wonderful heavens, the moon and the stars, the work of Your fingers, but You have made man a little lower than the angels.* Far from saying that man is puny, the Psalmist is saying that man is greater than all these other things. The word for angels here is *elohim*. This is very powerful. He is saying, You have made man a little lower than God. You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor, and all those things are under his dominion.

Here are Shakespeare's sentiments on man from *Hamlet*: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in Reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an Angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!

and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 285-300). Shakespeare likens man to an angel.

Pavlov was a scientist in pre-communist Russia. Perhaps you are familiar with his experiments with dogs. Pavlov likens man to a dog. We can train dogs to salivate when we ring a bell, and we can do the same thing with human beings. The whole philosophy of behaviorism, which has been so influential since the 20th century, likens man to a dog or even a machine. B. F. Skinner invented what is called the Skinner Box and put his own daughter in it as a way of controlling her conditioning. They do this because they deny the image of God in man.

Man's Dignity Consists in Thought

We now consider some quotes from the French mathematician, physicist, and theologian Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). The existentialists wrongly claim that he was one of their intellectual leaders. Here is what he has to say about man, "It is not in space that I must seek my human dignity, but in the ordering of my thought. It will do me no good to own land. Through space the universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck; through thought I grasp the universe" (*Pensées*, VI:348 [Variant Translation]).

If you are going to compare the size of man with the universe, you are a speck. We know that far better than Pascal did in the 17th century. It is only in the last hundred years or so that people have started to grasp the immensity of the universe. Pascal says, "Through space the universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck. Through thought, I grasp the universe." He continues, "Man's greatness comes from knowing he is wretched: a tree does not know it is wretched. Thus, it is wretched to know that one is wretched, but there is greatness in knowing one is wretched" (*Pensées*, 114).

Here is perhaps one of Pascal's most famous paragraphs on mankind:

Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed. There is no need for the whole universe to take up arms to crush him. A vapor, a drop of water is enough to kill him.

But, even if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because he knows that he is dying and the advantage the universe has over him; the universe knows none of this. Thus, all our dignity consists in thought. It is on thought we must depend for our recovery, and not on space and time which we could never fill. Let us then strive to think well; that is the basic principle of morality. (*Pensées*, VI:347)

He says, “All of our dignity consists in thought.” Look at man’s achievements. When you attend various athletic competitions or watch them on television and see a sprinter run twenty miles per hour for a few seconds, you think, *Wow! Twenty miles an hour!* Watch a high jumper, and perhaps he will reach eighteen or twenty feet. *Wow! Eighteen feet!* This is insignificant. Ants can jump one hundred times their height. Fleas can jump three hundred times their height. Yet we think it is great when man jumps three times his height. Horses can run thirty to forty miles per hour. Cheetahs can run seventy miles per hour. Yet we are awed when man runs twenty miles per hour. If you compare man’s attributes of size, speed, or strength to God’s other creations, man is puny indeed. This is why Pascal says that all our dignity consists in thought.

Reason Distinguishes Man from the Animals

Returning to Scripture, look at *Psalms* 32:8-9: “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.” This is one of the verses that shows that the difference between man and the animals is understanding. Animals are not made in the image of God. They have no understanding.

Proverbs 30:2 states, “Surely I am more stupid than any man, And do not have the understanding of a man” (*NKJV*).

Jude 9, 10 read, “Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about

the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves” (*NKJV*). The interesting thing here is the phrase, *brute beasts*. In the Greek New Testament, this word *brute* is the Greek word *ἄλογια* meaning *without reason*. The beasts are without reason.

A similar passage is *2 Peter* 2:12: “But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption” (*NKJV*). The same Greek word for *brute* is there also.

Recall the situation in *Daniel* 4 where Nebuchadnezzar as a punishment from God loses his understanding. Scripture says he grazes in the field like an animal because he is without understanding. The conclusion that we ought to draw from these verses is that the distinction between man and animals is his reason.

Going back to *John* 1, Christ is the Logos, the Light that lights every man. That is the image. It is not man’s body, it is not a function, but the fact that he is rational. The *Confession* and *Catechisms* refer to man as a reasonable and rational soul—a soul able to reason. Animals are souls, but they are not reasonable and rational souls.

The rest of the article will conclude in the next Trinity Review.

The 2020 Overstock Book Sale is extended into 2021. The shipping has been changed to \$7.50 for the first item.