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IN THE IMAGE OF GOD – BECAUSE HE IS...I CAN BE
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I. THE PROBLEM: CHRISTIANITY IS LOSING ITS DOCTRINAL DEFINITION

Biblical Christianity has a vocabulary all of its own. We use terms the rest of the world hears, but doesn't have the faintest idea what we mean. Because of this, Christian concepts are often rejected as not fitting reality. What is even worse, the non-Christian world often gives our terms and vocabulary completely different meanings, often making generalizations where Christian doctrines are specific. A general definition of a theological concept is really no definition at all! It permits anyone and everyone to believe anything, and no one is expected to be precise.

In time, everything for everyone becomes nothing special to anyone, and theological terms lose their meaning and purpose. Thus Christian theological liberalism now embraces paganism (other non-Christian religious systems), pantheism (the idea that life in nature is divine), and animism (worship of the spiritual life force in physical objects), and often resists and writes against the supernatural necessities of Christianity such as a supernatural creation, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, etc. To make matters even worse, evangelicalism now embraces liberalism.

Today, theological studies and definitions are seldom part of a church's purpose or its program. The rush to be everybody's church will soon give way to being nobody's church. The current theological hodgepodge church looks successful, but unbiblical methodology always gives way to modernism, which is an attempt to update or modernize the Christian faith to make it more palatable to the unregenerate mind. This dilemma is not new; it is the story of church history. In modern times it simply recycles faster (about once per decade) than it did throughout history. Degenerative changes occur faster when there is little resistance resulting from doctrinal understanding and Christian convictions.

II. THE PRACTICE: WE USE TERMS WE NEVER DEFINE

Consider the most basic term in the Christian faith, "God created man in His own image," as an example. Forget for a moment that believers are often unable to give a usable definition of God. Forget also that believers

often openly reject creationism. But we should have some understanding of being created “in His own image,” (Genesis 1:27). This is not only the opening concept taught in the Holy Scriptures, but it is the most foundational doctrine of Christian anthropology! But what does it mean?

I preached my first sermon in 1950. Since then I have preached or taught about 13,000 sermons or lessons. I have undoubtedly used the term “in the image of God” repeatedly. I only recently asked myself what do I mean when I use this statement. To my surprise I realized I didn’t have a clue as to what I meant, and I had only hoped that the people who heard me teach and preach had a better understanding of the term than I did.

III. THE POSSIBILITIES: SIMPLE EXPLANATIONS ARE OFTEN VERY INCOMPLETE

When I say I didn’t know what the term meant, it is not to say that, like everyone else, I didn’t have some general idea. I was satisfied to repeat other people’s thinking rather than do my own. After all, thinking is hard, and studying is even harder! Harder yet is putting concepts into meaningful vocabulary.

I knew that “in the image of God” could mean:

1. Man having a three-part existence, body (physiological), soul (psychological), and mind (intellectual), as God has intellect, sensibility, and will. But my Maltese dogs have the ability to think, the ability to love, and the will to act, believe me. They prove it at 2:00 a.m. when they want chocolate ice cream!
2. Man has the capacity of conceptualizing God and the inward compulsion to love and obey Him. This is doubtlessly true, but you sometimes have to look hard for the compulsion to love and obey God.
3. Man can know God.
4. The original creation of man was in fellowship with God, but this was lost through sin.
5. Perfected, man is like God.
6. Man alone in God’s creation is capable of experiencing God.

I knew all of these, and there are possibilities of other concepts if I wanted to share them. But so what? What meaningful and practical help were these concepts even when I did know them? More importantly, is this really what God means when He uses the phrase “created in the image of God”?

IV. THE PURSUIT: AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE PHRASE, “IN THE IMAGE OF GOD,” AND FIND PRACTICAL MEANING FOR MY LIFE

Because of limited space, the rest of this article will be in outline form.

A. GOD IS AN ETERNAL PERSON

1. Definition: God is an infinite eternal spirit Person who is the cause behind creation.
2. Infinite: Every attribute of God is unmeasurable and inexhaustibly great.
3. Finite: Everything about created things is in contradiction to God in the sense that they are always limited in time, space, and energy.
4. Text: Acts 17:28 "...in him (the Lord) we live, move and have our being...we are His offsprings..."
 - a. Live = cause to exist, created
 - b. Move = cause to accomplish
 - c. Our being = cause to continue
 - d. Offspring = we are His creative and accountable accomplishments
 - e. God is too great to be housed in temples and idols, or shared through any part of His creation.
5. Application: Because God is an eternal spirit Person (John 4:20), I can be an everlasting person always existing in eternity in either heaven or hell (I Thessalonians 5:23). I am also capable of receiving eternal life as a gift from God through Christ (John 10:28). This makes the difference between heaven and hell.

B. GOD IS A SUPERNATURAL PERSON

1. Creation: God created without counsel, Isaiah 40:9-12.
2. Accountability: at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10.
3. Application: Because God is a supernatural creative person, I can and must be an eternally accountable person.

C. GOD IS A TOTALLY KNOWING PERSON

1. God knows everything about every person as well as every situation and circumstance, Psalms 139:1-6.
2. Jesus presented himself as truth, John 14.6.
3. Truth in order to be truth must always be true at all times, in all cultures and under every circumstance. It can never not be true.
4. Truth must be eternal, fixed, and final to be truth.
5. Truth is not a precept, it is a Person. He is the source of truth.
6. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.
 - a. Way spans the distance from man to God.
 - b. Truth is full and complete knowledge of everything.
 - c. Life is the process of being from creation to eternity.
7. Three reasons to know Jesus:
 - a. Without truth there is no correct knowing of facts fitting reality.
 - b. Without life there is no correct measurement of living.
 - c. Without the way there is no correct process of existing, either now or in heaven.
8. Application: Because God is always an all-knowing Person, I can know some truth in this life and in eternity.

D. GOD IS EVERYWHERE

1. There is no place where one can escape the presence of God, Psalms 139:7-10.
2. Jesus promised to be with the believers everywhere they might be and at every point in time, Matthew 28:20.
3. Application: Because God is an always everywhere present God, I can and will always be somewhere present and will always be fully under His awareness.

E. GOD NEVER VARIES

1. God is good and perfect, James 1:17-18.
 - a. Father of lights = creator and maintainer.
 - b. Nothing can cause even a shadow cast by a change made by turning.
 - c. No variableness = God has an unalterable set of purposes.
 - d. Word of truth = The revealed Holy Scripture is the source of information which one needs to understand the message of salvation.
 - e. Beget us = being born again through the message of the gospel.
 - f. Firstfruits = man is created as the highest form of creation and is capable of knowing, loving, and being consecrated to God.
2. God is capable of caring, James 1:19-21.
 - a. God asks for meekness rather than anger.
 - b. God asks for our attention to major on His sufficiencies rather than our selfishness.
 - c. God asks for our separation from sin rather than our becoming the servant of sin.
 - d. Application: Because God is always constant and changeless in His character, I can be expected, by Him and by others, to have consistency in my conduct.

V. THE MORAL ATTRIBUTES OF GOD AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO BEING “CREATED IN HIS IMAGE”

The moral attributes of God determine how we are to live as extensions of God’s morality through creation. They become the sole standard for man’s virtues and vices. Through them we can know right from wrong and what we ought to do and ought not to do.

Correct human social mores are then as fixed and final as God’s moral attributes. Trespasses and sins are a measurement of meeting or missing the mark of God’s moral attributes rather than man’s constantly changing judgment of what is good or relevant.

A culture will always tend to become like its concept of the creator.

A. GOD IS HOLY

1. Isaiah called God "The Holy One" 30 times Isaiah 40:25-31.
2. Holiness is God's foremost ranking attribute.
3. Holiness means that God is absolutely separate from and completely above all His creatures and equally absolutely separate from all moral evil, sin.
4. Holiness is co-extensive with all of God's other attributes. His purity of being precludes His purity of doing.
5. The believer is asked to be holy because God is holy, I Peter 1:15-21; Hebrews 12:10; John 17:11.
6. Three corollary truths:
 - a. God and man are separated because of human sin.
 - b. God can only be approached through the merits of another.
 - c. God must be approached in reverential respect.
7. Application: Because God is an infinitely holy God, I can identify evil and live separately from it. In doing so, I can live for the Lord in an honorable way.

B. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS AND JUST

1. God is always just and righteous in all the ways He treats his creation.
2. The Judge of the earth shall do right, Genesis 18:25.
3. God has instituted a moral government, imposed just laws, and attached sanctions on His creation.
 - a. Sanctions include the certainty of judgment.
 - b. Sanctions include the varied severity of judgment.
 - c. Sanctions include punishment as a preservation of justice.
 - d. Sanctions include having no favorite persons, Romans 2:11.
4. Redemption is the result of vicarious rather than personal punishment. At Calvary, Christ became a substitutionary sacrifice for sin. The gospel is the result of personalizing the work of Christ on the cross, Romans 5:8-11.
5. Application: Because God is righteous and just in all His actions, I can identify violations of His virtues and seek forgiveness from Him.

C. GOD IS GOOD

1. Jesus taught that God does only good, Mark 10:18.
2. Three corollary truths related to God being only good.
 - a. God works through love, versus the pagan concept that gods hate and work through anger. Love is always kind and never cruel. God's love is a display of His rational and voluntary affection, Ephesians 5:1,2.
 - b. God works through mercy. In mercy, God responds to man's needs in ways that are good for us while undeserved by us. Mercy is God's way to respond to man's misery. In mercy, God shows compassion, pity, caring, and kindness, I Peter 1:3,4.
 - c. God works through grace. Grace is that part of God's attributes which causes Him to act in mercy. Love prompts grace and grace acts in mercy. All good things we receive from God are unmerited, I John 4:8.

3. Application: Because God is always and only good, I can have a model for my life to display God's love and grace by showing mercy to all people at all times and under all situations.

D. GOD IS TRUTH

1. The most complete revelation of God is in the person of Jesus Christ. He revealed God the Father as full of grace and truth, John 1:14.

2. Truth is more than facts fitting reality (knowledge). Truth to be truth must always be truth. It must be so at all times, in all cultures and on all occasions. If it is flexible or changeable, it is not truth. Thus, truth must be eternal! Truth then is not a set of precepts or principles; rather it is the reflection of an eternal Person.

3. Truth is an attribute of God. He is the foundation of all knowledge.

4. Pilate did not recognize truth when it was standing in his presence, John 18:38. He asked a philosophical question which does not have a philosophical answer.

5. Jesus' revelation of truth is that the ultimate truth is God, and that He was the earthly manifestation of truth, John 14:6.

6. Truth surpasses the wisdom of man, Romans 11:33-36. That is to say, that man can never counsel God. We can only stand in awe of His vastly superior wisdom and glorify Him as subjects of His creation.

7. Application: Because God is truth in its source, I can demonstrate faith in His total trustworthiness. I can trust Him for life as I now live it on earth and I can trust Him for life eternal.

E. SUMMARY

Being created in the image of God has both earthly and eternal blessing. The great challenge for all believers is to demonstrate a high level of efficiency in living up to the nature of the God who created us in His image. He is...so I can be...

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