

Introduction

This is a collection of sermon notes that I posted on a church Facebook page in early 2018 when I did a sermon series on what it means to be created in the image of God. In reality, these notes are a very condensed form of a series of blog posts that I wrote 2 years before that to test this manner of teaching about the image of God to a readership of thousands, of just about every Denominational background you can think of, from all over the world in the hope that one day I could use this method to write a book on the subject... and as I found out, it is a much bigger subject than I had first realized. I'm sure I'll tell you a bit more about it when we get together, but for now I'll just say that this was the most successful writing project that I've ever posted online and with thousands of comments that were made at the time, only one of them was negative. I hope you enjoy reading through these notes, and am looking forward to our time together in Florida.

Don

Sunday Sermon Notes: January 21, 2018

Title: *Created in God's Image*

Text: Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:26-27 (NASB)

One thing is very clear from the start; Man was created in God's image, His likeness; there isn't anything hidden in this is there?

It doesn't appear so at first glance, the English of the New American Standard Bible is clear, concise and fairly literal in its translation. Even so, it is a translation from ancient Hebrew, and particularly when we are basing a study on a specific word, we need to check the original language to verify the translations. When I checked, I found that the Hebrew word translated "image" in the English is *tsehlem*, and for good measure, the Hebrew word translated "likeness" is *demuth*. Here are the definitions:

tsehlem: from an unused root meaning to shade; a phantom, i.e. (figuratively) illusion, resemblance; hence, a representative figure, especially an idol:—image, vain shew. (Strong's H6754)

demuth: resemblance; concretely, model, shape; adverbially, like:—fashion, like (-ness, as), manner, similitude. (Strong's H1823)

When we look at these two definitions, we might be slightly confused with the first one, since there can be a connotation with an idol, and in fact this word is used multiple times in the Old Testament to mean just that; an image, an idol. Yet when you think about it, “image” is exactly the point, and not all images are images of false gods. A photograph is an image, which is why we go to Google and do an “image search” when we want a picture of something or someone, for the image looks just like the real thing. A photographic image of you bears your likeness, and so it would appear that Man bears the likeness or image of God; we look like Him, or at least, when humans were first created, we looked like Him.

There are some leads in these two verses that we will need to follow up on, but first, it seems to me that we need to ask ourselves a question:

Knowing what happens in Genesis 3 when the woman, and then the man chose to eat from that one tree they were forbidden to eat from, did the resulting fall, and its consequences cancel out this image factor? We need to look into this now, because if it cancelled out God’s image within

us, then what’s the point of going forward? Our questions would be answered; the fact that we were created in the image of God at the beginning really makes no difference now. However, if the image and likeness of God were neither cancelled nor revoked after the fall, then we have a great deal of exploring left to do.

So here’s what I did to find out: I went to Bible Gateway and searched for “image of God” (with quotes) and I got three hits: First, I got Genesis 1:27 (above) and then I got Genesis 9:6, and finally 2 Corinthians 4:4. Here they are:

Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

Genesis 9:6 (NASB)

in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Cor. 4:4 (NASB)

It would appear that we have something of value here, but without looking further, we only have a couple of “proof texts” which may or may not prove anything, so I’d better follow my own rules and check out the context...

Genesis 9:6

Holy heart attack! I looked this verse up, and I found that it falls within the context of Gen. 9:1-29, which falls within the overall context of Gen. 7-9: the Flood. Chapter 9 is God making His covenant with Noah, whereby God promises to never again destroy the earth by a flood, and gives Noah some terms to follow, one of which is found in vv. 5-6; that stipulation is that we are not to shed man’s blood (murder), and if we do, our blood will be shed by man, and God gives His reason for this: *We are made in His image*. In Genesis 9:6, God Himself is speaking to

Noah; it is an imperative command of God. Thus, this confirms that the image of God is still intact in us after the fall.

2 Corinthians 4:4

This verse falls within the larger context beginning in 2 Cor. 2:12 and running through chapter 5 about the ministry of reconciliation. Throughout this section, in various ways, Paul makes the point that Jesus is the source of our message, of our resolve and of our calling as Christians, not ourselves, for Jesus is the exact representation of the Father, and we, as ministers of reconciliation, are vessels of clay through which He ministers in this world. God is seen in Jesus (image, likeness) and Jesus is seen in us (image, likeness).

Of course, Paul didn't write this in Hebrew, for he wrote in Greek, and the word he was using was *eikon* (from which we get our English word "icon") and guess what it means? Yes sir, it means "image, likeness".

Therefore, not only is the image of God present in Man after the Fall, it is present all the more with us in Christ.

I don't know about you, but I would have to say that our exploring is just getting started, and we have some leads to follow up on. Certainly, there are two that I can't wait to get into: First is, who is the "us" and "our" we found in our verses, and second is this: Are women created in the image of God, or is it just men?

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:26-27 (NASB)

If we decide that humanity is made in God's image, and we cite a text in which God speaks of Himself as "us" and "our", which is to say in the plural, then we need to consider what this plurality refers to so as to ensure that our understanding of this "likeness" is correct. One way to work this out would be to look at the other "In the beginning" passage in Scripture, which is found in John 1:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5, 14

In John's account, which actually begins before the Creation, it is clear that at least 2 Persons of the Godhead are present, for the Word that became flesh and was with God, and was God from before the beginning of Creation, is quite clearly a reference to the Son, Jesus. So, it would seem that Father and Son were very much involved in Creation; I wonder if we can find the Spirit as well...

Returning to the Genesis text, I found this:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (1:1-2)

Thus, we find all three Persons of the Godhead present and at work in the Creation, and we humans are made in the fullness of the image of God; that appears to me to be the meaning of the "Us" and the "our".

The next lead found in our text (Genesis 1:26-27) is that of male and female:

in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Thus, we can surely say that both male and female forms contain the image of God and indeed, we may well find even more significance as we continue our study.

Sunday Sermon Notes: January 28, 2018

Title: *Images, Form and Spirits*

Text: Gen. 3:8-9

God is spirit and so are we— that was demonstrated when God first created Adam out of the dust of the ground, and then breathed His breath of life into the man (Gen. 2:7-8). We also know that we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Christ, so clearly, we are both physical and spirit; the Scripture references of this are familiar to us all. That we are embodied is also obvious to all; what is not obvious is whether or not God has a form, a body, and appearance.

There are two theological terms that describe visual appearances of God. What's more, there is a third theological term that is used to refer to comparisons of human references to describe or explain God's attributes. These terms are:

Theophany: A temporary and visible manifestation of God in a human or other form.

Christophany: A pre-incarnation appearance of Christ.

Anthropomorphism: The attribution of human characteristic to God in order to explain or express His attributes. (Theological definition, there are other applications in science).

It stands to reason, does it not, that if we have theological terms about the “appearance” or visual manifestation of God, that God has an appearance, and if human attributes can be used to describe the attributes of God, that humans do indeed carry His image or likeness in some way. The only thing is, the “form” in which God appears may seem to be temporary... or does He have a permanent form?

Let’s look at some texts:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:8-9)

These verses come in the story of the fall and its aftermath (Gen. 3:1-24); both Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, and now they sought to hide from Him, and they “heard the sound” of God

walking in the Garden. God is Spirit, of that we can be certain, but on that fateful day, He was walking through the Garden, a physical act, making noise that could be heard by the physical ear, and spoke in language with a voice that could also be physically heard by humans. The text also implies that the sound of God walking through the Garden was recognized as Him walking, as though this was not unusual, and if it wasn’t unusual, then why were the two hiding? Why wouldn’t God relate to Adam this way when Adam was in his sinless state? God had a form and appearance in the physical sense in the Garden.

Shall we try another text?

Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When the two of them stepped forward, he said, “Listen to my words:

“When there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

Numbers 12:5-8 (full context Num. 12:1-16)

Who can forget the time when Miriam and Aaron were called out for daring to oppose Moses?

For our purposes, did you notice that God seems to think that He has a visible form? With other prophets, God deals in visions, dreams and riddles, but He gets with Moses face to face, in person.

The Hebrew word used is **temuna** (H8544) which means “form, image, likeness, representation, semblance” and is found ten times in the Old Testament (Ex. 20:4; Num. 12:8; Deut. 4:12, 15, 16, 23, 25, 5:8; Job4:16; Ps. 17:15) with consistent meaning and application.

It is beginning to be clear to me that God does in fact have a form, and He may from time to time, at His sole discretion, choose to be seen by humans, and it is also becoming clear to me

that we cannot discount this as though it were some sort of a fluke. Yes indeed, God is Spirit, that fact is not in despite, but as I've long suspected, it is beginning to appear as though our understanding of what that means has been a bit short-sighted. Ask yourself a question: How many times have we read passages of Scripture in which someone saw an angel of the Lord? Angels are also spirit beings, and yet when the occasion arises, they too can be seen to have a form in Scripture.

I don't know about you, but I'm intrigued. Let's continue to follow this trail; there are more passages to examine...

Take a look at *Exodus 33:18-21*:

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." At this point in his experience, Moses wanted to see God, but that was not permissible, for no one could see God's face and live. In order for this to be true, wouldn't God need *to have a face*? So, God decided to let Moses see His back... Wouldn't He need to have a back? Of course, it would also appear that He had a hand, since He was going to us it to cover Moses' eyes...

The real question presented by these two verses is: What happened between Exodus 33 and Numbers 12 that made it possible for Moses and God to talk face to face? Nothing in our discussion thus far negates the fact that God is Spirit, nor does anything negate the fact that humans also have a spirit:

Humans as we know already have both form and spirit, and if God also has both form and spirit, then there is more significance for us in the here and now of being created in His image, than there would be otherwise, for it results in far-reaching implications.

The Image of God and the Western Mind

So far our journey of exploration has found that God's image, and our having been created in His image, runs headlong into the inescapable conclusion that it covers the whole package of human existence, body, soul and spirit. For many people, the idea of God having a form is a tough one to grasp, leading to difficulty in understanding that His image is also reflected in our human form. Certainly, there are many who would argue against this notion, and yet looking at Scripture, it's hard to miss.

The difficulty that many of us have in seeing this is that most of us are Western in our orientation, and this makes quite a lot of Scripture hard to understand, for the Scriptures were

not written by Western minds or in a Western mindset; they were written from an ancient Hebrew perspective, which is quite different.

In the early years of the church, the dominant mindset was Hebrew; even the Gentile believers learned to view things in the Hebrew manner, but as time moved forward, and Christianity became more and more populated by Gentiles, and Christianity became dominant in Europe, there came an impetus to move in a direction more akin to the traditions of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and away from that of the Jews. With time, even pagan ceremonies and observances were incorporated into the church because the church had become part of the State, beginning with Constantine making Christianity the State Religion of the Roman Empire.

By the time of the Reformation, Christianity was dominated by Western thought, and many of our doctrinal traditions of today came out of this period when some of the greatest theologians of all time wrote from an entirely Western point of view, including such names as Luther and Calvin. To the Western mind, God is most notable for His free exercise of power, while to the Hebrew, God is most notable for His restraint. The Western mind sees the physical realm as fallen, corrupt and depraved, while to the Hebrew it is God's perfect creation. To the Western mind, the human body is inherently evil, to the Hebrew the human body is inherently good; God's own image. To the Western perspective, a spirit having a form is hard to conceive of, but for the Hebrew mind, it is a given.

The Scriptures are more difficult for those of us who were raised and trained in the West; we miss things like the proper role of covenants, the nature of our own beings and how to understand apocalyptic texts; we even understand writers like the Apostle Paul as Western, when in fact, Paul was a Pharisee among Pharisees, trained by Gamaliel; the intellectual antithesis of Greek philosophy.

Sunday Sermon Notes: February 4, 2018

Title: *The Image of God and the New Testament*

Text: John 5:36-40

Jesus and His Father

Last week we looked at the issue of images, form and spirits through the lens of a few Old Testament passages; today we have a few from the New Testament in Jesus' words, before we move on to another line of exploring. Getting right to it, we come to a verse from Matthew's Gospel:

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. (Matt. 18:10)

This falls within a larger section in which Jesus was “discipling the disciples”, teaching them about what it means to follow Him, and focusing in on His messianic mission. Remember also that this was a transitional verse that moved into a parable, that was all about how a disciple should not disdain or diminish anyone (Matt. 18:10-14). This transitional verse has a way of flying past us without much notice, but for our purposes, have a look. Jesus speaks of the angels in heaven who “see the face of my Father” almost in passing, really as a given, as though it would be so obvious that it really didn’t deserve any attention of its own, as He moves onto His larger point. Yet for our present adventure, we need to see that God has a face means that even in heaven, God has some sort of a form.

If this were simply a turn of phrase or an idiom, wouldn’t we expect to see it in other places? Jesus only used this phrase once, thus it would appear that Jesus means the words literally.

Shall we try another one?

I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

John 5:36-40 (emphasis added)

This passage falls within the context of 5:1-47, beginning when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. The man told the Jewish leaders who had done the shocking deed, and beginning in verse 16 they confront Jesus about His unlawful behavior. Jesus’ defense in vv. 19-30 is essentially that He is doing His Father’s work when the Father sees fit to do it, and then in 5:31 ff. Jesus is citing that He has two witnesses to prove this: John (the Baptist) and the Father Himself. Contextually speaking, His words in verse 37 (You have never heard his voice nor seen his form) are an integral part of His defense in which the fact that the Father has both a voice and a form are understood to be facts. If this were not the case, then Jesus is making a very poor defense and opening Himself up to further accusations.

To be quite candid at this point, the first time I looked at these passages, I was a little uneasy for even though the way I had been taught never rang true for me, and I could easily see its flaws, I find myself struggling at this point because I don’t understand how this works, and I am the sort who likes to understand how things work. Then, a certain statement that Jesus made, that we can all quote, came to mind; a passage that made the whole thing sensible to me.

The Scriptures contain God’s complete revelation of Himself to Mankind; everything He has revealed to us. Yet this is not to suggest that He has revealed to us everything that there is to know. When my kids were young, there was a time when I had taught them everything they knew about politics, but I hadn’t come close to teaching them everything *I knew* about politics. At that time, I was right in the middle of the fray, and I knew things they simply were not ready

for or capable of handling responsibly. God, our Creator, our loving heavenly Father has not revealed everything He knows to us, simply because He knows things that we can neither handle nor properly comprehend; He has revealed to us what we need to know.

So, for the purposes of our exploration into the image of God, there are aspects of it that we will most likely not fully comprehend, and one of those is how a spirit can have a form which, on occasion, can be seen by a person. Yet Scripture does reveal that they do, and that God, who is Spirit, has a form and that we have been created in His likeness, as we have already seen.

As I mentioned earlier, this was a tough one for me to grab a hold of, to get my brain around, until I recalled this verse:

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

John 14:9

Contextually speaking, this verse falls within Jesus' final discourse with His disciples (John 14-17) on the night of His arrest. He is giving them encouragement and guidance for the trials they lay ahead, and in this particular part of the discussion, He is telling them that He is in the Father, the Father is in Him, and that He is in us, another little concept that is not easy to comprehend the mechanics of.

So, imagine you are there with Jesus that night, and He says this, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father": What do you see when you look at Jesus? (Try to picture this in your mind)

If you are honest, the first thing you will see is His physical presence, His body, but knowing who you are looking at, you will perceive much more than that, for Jesus embodied the power of God, healing the sick, making the lame whole again, giving sight to the blind, chasing out demons and bringing justice and the Kingdom to the people, and just as we cannot separate

Jesus from the Word, we also cannot separate His humanity from His divinity. When Paul said that Christ was "the image of God" in 2 Corinthians 4:4, he spoke of the complete package.

Many scholars have observed, and I think rightly so, that Jesus was the Holy Spirit in a body. You and I are earthen vessels that contain the Holy Spirit, for in Christ, we have the Holy Spirit indwelling our mortal bodies, for we have been created in the image of God, body, soul and spirit, and it is the entire package that comprises God's image and likeness.

I think I should give you some time for reflection on this, for it truly is a really big deal to be made in God's image. I will conclude for now by simply saying that the more I think about this, the more I realize that the implications of this are beyond huge; they are profound and vast.

The Image of God and the Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul was a Jew, in fact he was a Pharisee; everything about him was Jewish, including his mindset. He was the Pharisee who persecuted Christians, who met Jesus on the road to Damascus and who gave his life to Christ and became the apostle to the Gentiles, and in the process of all this, he wrote the largest part of the New Testament sending his writings to Gentiles. Ironic isn't it?

A common theme that runs through his writings is that of the old way of life versus the new life in Christ, and in discussing this, he used several ways of explaining it. Perhaps the most common of these was his dichotomy between "the flesh" and "the spirit", but he also described the same thing in other terms; the first man v. the second man, the old man v. the new man, the Law v. life. In all of this, Paul makes essentially the same point; we have choices to make.

On the one hand, we can continue to live according to the ways of this world, just like we did before we had a relationship with Jesus Christ, or we can live a new life in Him. We can worry about the transactional legalism of the Law, or we can be free in Christ; yes, that is our decision to make. None of that, however, tells us that our physical forms are anything other than the image of God, nothing Paul has written tells us that our bodies are bad, wicked, evil or terrible; actually, the opposite is true.

If God made us with physical bodies that are evil, wicked, shameful and oozing sin, then why would using our bodies for sinful purposes be "immoral"? In such a case, we could rightly say that God made us sinful and wicked, and we just can't help being what God made us, but Paul (not to mention Jesus) taught the exact opposite. Paul not only gave us the problems, he also gave us the solution: "be transformed by the renewing of your mind", and "set your mind on things that are above". Humanity's great challenge comes not from evil in our physical bodies, but from the wrong kinds of thinking, for we start our journey with Christ thinking like everyone else around us, rather than seeing things from a more heavenly perspective. Consequently, our focus is on the things of this physical life; money, food, shelter, pleasure, entertainment, sex, luxuries, sensuality, emotions, feelings, passions and social positions... just like the pagans.

Does this kind of thinking describe Jesus?

Paul did not contradict the notion that we were created, in every way in the image of God, for it is precisely because we were created in God's image that this is important.

And we don't have to do this on our own... that's why we have the indwelling Holy Spirit.

A Note for Retreat Attendees: Several days after posting this edition of Sermon notes, I received an email from a long-time blogging friend Katherine Haddad who is a Christina author and Ministry Leader. Her ministry is taking the Gospel to Muslims in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. She wanted to let me know that she had been working with a young man in Syria who was interested in the Gospel but who couldn't get past the idea that Christianity is pantheistic, worshipping three gods. She sent him the link to this post, and for him, seeing the connection

between the Triune God and Man created in and bearing His image, body, soul and spirit, brought him to the place where he was ready to surrender to Christ...

I must admit that I never would have seen that possibility myself, yet there it is: The Word of God is indeed living and active!

Sunday Sermon Notes: February 11, 2018

Title: *Searching for More Clues*

Text Genesis 1:28-31

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Genesis 1:28-31

By now, we have a pretty good idea that our having been created in the image of God applies to us as a total package; body, soul and spirit. If this is true, as it appears to be, then we should find evidence in the story of Adam and Eve, something that would confirm this image in action or application. These verses from Genesis 1 follow the text we looked at recently in which "image" and "likeness" were first mentioned, ending with both the male and the female comprising all or part of God's likeness.

Right away, God tells them to "be fruitful and increase in number" which is an obvious reference to making babies. I'm pretty sure there is a clue here, what do you think? God continues to say that their increased numbers should fill the whole earth "and subdue it", and I am thinking this is a second clue. Finally, God tells them that they (humanity) should "rule over" all of the creatures that God has created, or as the old King James said to "have dominion" over them.

Let's begin with that one, that humans should rule over all of the creatures that God created, to "subdue" the earth. Who is it that rules over all of Creation?

That's an easy one, for we all know that God rules the universe through the Person of Jesus Christ who rules as King of kings and Lord of lords. Thus, when God told Adam to "subdue"

and “rule over” He was in effect delegating a portion of His divine prerogative to them. They would rule according to God’s will and purpose over the earth.

Stop and consider: These two original people, bearing the image of God Himself were to multiply through a physical act to fill the earth with more people bearing the image of God, to subdue and rule over all that God had created here on earth. In doing so, they would be (in His image and doing His will to accomplish His purpose) the very expression of who and what God is. This is why God created humanity; to express Him through fellowship with Him, and quite clearly that fellowship consists of both relationship and His purpose.

Why did Jesus come to earth in the incarnation?

Yes, He came to go to the cross so that God’s original purpose could be restored and attained. By the cross, fellowship between Man and God that had been broken (Gen. 3) was restored, and today it is back in place, only our purpose is to subdue the earth by making disciples for the Kingdom of heaven which upon Jesus’ return will culminate in the removal of all evil from the earth.

Back to Genesis...

Verses 29-30 contain the terms of this arrangement: God gave us all of the trees and plants for food, and forbade them to eat from that one certain tree; follow the rule, and all is fine and dandy, break this one simple request, and there would be problems...

There is a parallel in Genesis 2; let’s take a look...

Genesis 2 gives us a more detailed account of Adam and Eve, the story goes along smoothly as we have already seen, until the end, where there are two comments that seem to come from left field. Here’s the first one:

The man said,

*“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”*

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 2:23-24

Verse 23 is Adam’s comment in quotes; what a nice little ending to that part of the story: Next section...

And then verse 24 drops out of nowhere, the narrator is speaking suddenly in a way that doesn’t actually fit the rest of the chapter; if Moses was the author of Genesis, then why did Moses add that verse?

I took the liberty of a little research, and I discovered that this word string “one flesh” appears 5 times in Scripture, one is our text, and the other four are in the New Testament, and in two of those, Jesus was quoting Genesis 2:24. Hmm... interesting.

The first one of these is found in Matthew 19:

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matt. 19:4-6)

In this text, some Pharisees were trying to cause Jesus to say the wrong thing so they could accuse Him of something, anything, and they approached Him on the subject of divorce. Notice that in His answer, Jesus goes all the way back to Genesis 2:24 and highlights God’s intention that the male and the female shall come together and become “one flesh” in telling them that God is not so keen on divorce. For our purposes in exploring the image of God and its implications, knowing that male and female are bearers of the image of God, and that they are intended to become one flesh, it is hard to miss the presence of great significance in this statement. Mark also quotes Jesus using this verse in Mark 10:8 in answer to this same question.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:12 ff. was discussing sexual immorality in a larger discussion of freedom in Christ. He makes the point that the human is intended for the Lord, and that each is one of the members of Christ and then asks, *“Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!”* (6:15b). He goes on to say, *“Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.”* (6:16-17). There is a clear connection being made between bearing God’s image, becoming one flesh with a spouse and being united with God in His purpose. One more text:

Paul gives instruction for marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33; everything he wrote in these verses is about marriage, husbands and wives... until the surprise ending:

After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 5:29-33

Once again, the text moves along very smoothly and with no surprises, and Paul drops a bombshell: He isn’t really talking about marriage at all; he’s talking about our relationship with God, as pictured by the relationship of Christ and the Church. Even more amazing than that, the aspect of marriage that is the clincher in all of this is the husband and wife being “one flesh”. Put another way, when husband and wife unite sexually, we have a picture of Mankind uniting with Christ. Can you think of any other word that would mean the same thing as “picture”?

Two come to mind right away: One is “image” and the other is “likeness”.

I think this is a really good place for us to stop and reflect, so I’ll end for now.

Oh wait! I almost forgot the other odd statement, Genesis 2:25:

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

You know what? After reading these verses all together, this isn’t such an odd addition to Genesis 2 after all; why would they feel any shame; they were an **expression of God’s glory!**

Sunday Sermon Notes: February 18, 2018

Title: *And Then it Happened!*

Text: Genesis 3

We all know the story of Genesis 3 when Eve and then Adam ate from the tree that God had placed in the Garden next to the Tree of Life; God forbade them to eat of that tree- it was a covenant stipulation. Yet, after consultation with that famous serpent, they went for it anyway. As we have already seen, their having eaten from the forbidden tree did not change the fact that they were bearers of God’s image, but it certainly changed how they viewed it, and of course there were consequences for their actions.

They now knew both good and evil; that will certainly change one’s thinking about a lot of things, in fact, it might just make a person’s thinking evil.

In this chapter, we find out why 2:25 is there; it turns out that it wasn’t as random as it seemed at first. They had been unashamed, and then they disobeyed God and were ashamed. Exactly what they were ashamed of is something that is open for debate, and many have indulged in that debate over the centuries. Personally, as I view this chapter I see several apocalyptic elements, and if this were a study of Genesis per se, I would get into them in detail, but since this isn’t a study of Genesis, I will only say here that naked or not naked is one of those elements, and that nakedness is a powerful metaphoric component in Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, representing our having been created in God’s image on the one hand, and our separation from Him on the other.

God goes searching for Adam, who has made for himself a covering of leaves, and hidden in the trees, along with Eve. Of course, you can’t hide from God, who finds them, and has a little chat with them. As a result of this chat, God pronounces curses on the serpent, the woman and the man, and has them removed from the Garden forever. Interestingly, another one of the apocalyptic elements is found in 3:15 which is the first messianic prophecy.

While this is all very interesting, it doesn’t explain why they suddenly found themselves ashamed. Here’s what I think happened:

When the two ate from the forbidden tree, they were ashamed of what *they had done* and sought to hide themselves. It would appear from the text that they went into the bushes and shrubbery of the garden to hide, and they made clothing out of leaves to *hide from God*— since they had made a covering of leaves, they were not naked when God came looking for them, as Adam claimed in 3:10. Eating the fruit was the first sin, this lie was the second.

Obviously, this view fits with the Genesis 3 text, yet we still have the traditional teaching that they hid their shameful naked bodies from God...

Even so, we saw at the very beginning of our study together that the entry of sin into the world did not alter the fact that we are made in God's image (Gen. 9:6), so I must respectfully ask how the human body can be shameful?

That simply cannot be, unless we are prepared to tell God that His image is shameful or unclean... and I really wouldn't recommend that. Sometimes however, we behave shamefully. Yet our poor behavior has nothing to do with whether or not we are dressed; think about it... Not very many crimes are committed by naked people. Thus, in today's culture we might rightfully say that nakedness is frowned upon in public, that it might be socially awkward, even that it violates the predominant social conventions, but not that a naked person is shameful or sinful simply because they are naked.

But they might well be shameful for their behavior...

150 years ago, there wasn't much confusion about the meaning of sexual immorality, the same was true 100 years ago, even 50, but today; that's a whole different story. We have names for sexual practices and proclivities that none of us had even heard of when I was in my 20's, and things that were frowned upon in society then are now matters of human rights and Constitutional protection, even though the authors of the Constitution would be mortified to hear of it.

Maybe these are the ramblings of someone who is just past his prime... you can judge that for yourself.

Not too long ago, a preacher friend of mine was telling me that he has people, mostly on the young side as he is, who ask him questions about sexuality, questions for which they seek answers, but which he has a hard time answering because they are asking about things that aren't in the Bible, and even when they are in the Bible, he feels like the answers he gives are sounding very hollow in light of the changes in society, changes that have come upon us very quickly.

So, what exactly is sexual immorality?

It strikes me that this might be the wrong question; maybe we should ask what sexual *morality* is, rather than what sexual immorality is. In our investigation of the image of God and its significance, we have already found that answer, and it is such a significant answer that it is actually a central part of God's eternal purpose from the very beginning. We have seen that God made us in His image, our bodies, souls and spirits comprise His image in both male and

female. We have seen that because of this, a man leaves his parents and unites as “one flesh” with his wife in the ultimate expression of their love for one another, and that their physical union is symbolic of Christ and the church.

God’s love is expressed in His giving life to us; our love is expressed in giving life to new image bearers, so that in each case life is the result of love.

It is altogether fitting and proper for a man and woman to become one flesh in marriage, and their sexual union is a gift from God: It is also sexual morality, and we have already cited the Scripture to support this.

Sex outside of this relationship, whatever you might see fit to call it, is not the exercise of the gift as God intended it to serve His purpose and makes a mockery of His image, which is why the Bible makes such a big deal about it.

There is the information, simple and clear as it is; the real question before us is, “What will we do with the information?”

Another Note for Retreat Attendees: *After was posted for the first time on my blog, back in early 2016, I received no fewer than 16 emails from readers who told me that I had just changed their minds about gay marriage. Think about it... Have I mentioned gay... anything? Yes sir-ee the Word of God is powerful.*

Sunday Sermon Notes: February 25, 2018

Title: *The Image of God and Temptation*

Text: Genesis 2:15-17

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

Genesis 2:15-17

Temptation is a funny thing; it’s all around us, and takes a myriad of forms. Some things may tempt one person to stumble; while another may take no notice of it at all... yes, it’s a funny thing. OK, I’ll confess right now, potato chips are my downfall! At my house an open bag is an empty bag; they own me... I just cannot possibly say no when they call my name; woe is me, for Satan has my number!

Obviously, the only thing I said about potato chips that is actually true is that I really like them and eat more than I should; the rest is nonsense, purely a justification to deflect my own irresponsible choice to eat too many of them. Could I walk right by and not have any? Yes, but I

usually don't. Could I eat one or two and then stop? Yes, but I usually don't. Is there anyone else to blame for this? No, not on your life; it's all me.

Well, there is temptation in a nutshell.

To be clear and fair, I understand that there are medical conditions that affect some people in one way or another; I am not including that possibility in my remarks here; that is different topic entirely, so let's understand that I am not talking to people with medical, addiction or mental health problems in these remarks. Got it?

For most of us, when we fall into temptation, it was all our own doing; it was not necessary, and when we are honest with ourselves, we know that to be true.

With that said, then what is temptation really?

It is being presented with a choice to do or not do something that can harm us and/or our relationship with God. Yes, there are some lengthy systematic theologies on temptation, but when you sift out all of the unnecessary words, it comes down to making a choice, and no one is forcing us to choose the wrong one. We can blame this whole dilemma on the devil or this fallen world or anything you want, but temptation was present in the Garden of Eden when Man lived in perfect fellowship with God in a pre-fallen state, and Man made the wrong choice in spite of everything. Yes, the serpent was involved, but if he pointed a gun at Adam and Eve, that detail was omitted from the text.

No sir! Temptation is a consequence of free will.

God made us in His image, and one of the attributes that we have in common with God is free will. How do we use our free will to glorify God? Let's go back to Genesis 3...

There are two trees that stood together in the center of the Garden; look, there's Eve and the serpent having their little chat: The serpent asks the first question, Eve responds correctly. The serpent responds with a bald-faced lie. Eve hesitates, tempted, looks at the forbidden fruit; it looks really good, then she *remembers who and what she is*, and then she... grabs the yummy fruit from the Tree of Life and takes a big bite, and God is glorified.

Here's a question: *Who told you that you can't do that?*

When discussing this topic as I have, there is always a danger that the issue of temptation is simplified to the point where it isn't taken seriously, for yes, my presentation here is simplistic.

I have been told in the past, that it cannot be that simple, that life is really so very difficult that we can't possibly make the right choices...

I get that a lot.

It is as though people think I lead a charmed life, that I've never struggled, like everything was handed to me on a silver platter; "what do you know? It's too hard..."

I have lived long enough to know struggle, and I have struggles and challenges and weaknesses and failure just like everyone else. I am neither perfect nor close to it; ask my wife, she'll tell you that! I am a sinner just like you, I stumble and falter just like you.

And yes, it really is that simple.

When I was a boy in school, I was pretty good at arithmetic, but there was one thing I really had trouble with: Word problems; I just couldn't work them for the longest time. Then one day, I had an epiphany: most of the information they gave you in word problems was irrelevant, throw it out and you see the problem clearly and then it isn't as hard as you thought.

Most of the great theological questions are just like word problems were in math class; throw out the irrelevant and the actual issue isn't as complicated as we thought it was. Most of our struggles as Christians are neither as complicated as we think, nor as difficult as we make them.

When I was a teen, I would often hang out with my friends and sooner or later someone would say, "I'm bored, there's nothing to do." This would normally be followed by ideas for something to do, and nearly every time, we ended up doing the stupidest thing that was suggested, something that each and every one of us knew to be wrong, *and really didn't want to do*.

So why did we do it?

It wasn't because of this evil world, nor was it because we were totally depraved and incapable of doing the right thing. It also wasn't because we were stupid or bad kids; the group I used to hang out with grew up to be doctors, lawyers, professors, engineers, and professional athletes... no criminals or scoundrels. We did stupid things for one simple reason: Nobody wanted to be the one who wasn't cool, the one who would be called a... (slang term for less than a man).

It was peer pressure, the need to fit in with the gang.

At some point, teenagers are supposed to grow up and become adults and stop doing stupid things just to fit in, and most do. When this happens, we go from doing stupid things to fit in, and graduate to only doing dumb things to fit in.

Christians are also supposed to grow up, but this is more than just being adults; we are supposed to grow spiritually into the likeness of Christ. Having said that, I am fairly confident in saying that none of us have arrived at that goal yet; I know that I have a very long way to go, that I am certain of. I can also say with certainty that we won't arrive at the goal more quickly by giving in to being dumb to fit in with the group.

We get there by relationship both with others and with our Lord.

When temptation comes along, *of whatever sort*, it is very helpful for me and many others as well, to sort out the stuff that isn't helpful, things like personal bias, self-centeredness, baggage from the past, cultural trends and tradition to find the real equation that needs solving, and most of the time, the equation isn't as hard as it first appeared to be.

I can't say this often enough: Remember who you are in Christ! Ask yourself why you are tempted to do things that are not in accordance with what you know to be His teaching, ask yourself if you are showing your love for Christ by turning your back on Him...

I predict that whatever you are being tempted with will not seem so enticing.