

Chapter 2.

Whose Image?

It all began in the beginning, where God already was. The first thing revealed about God is that he is the Creator, and that he created through the process of his Word. God said...and it was so! God's Word is creative, powerful, sovereign. The universe exists and is upheld by the "word of his power." Our existence results from his Word. We have been trying to reverse that procedure since the beginning: to create God by our word, to make him in our image. But, as C. S. Lewis reminds us in the Narnia adventures, God is not a tame lion. He is not, in fact, tameable. And that is precisely why he remains God, unchallenged and unchallengeable.

In the beginning was God, the Creator, Sovereign. God who preexisted and transcends his creation. His Word, which is truth, dispels the darkness, and the light of truth is our very life. "Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us and we are his." (Or, "It is he that made us and not we ourselves.") "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture."

Our case for identity rests on the fact of God as Creator, and the reason he created. Our concept of God governs our sense of identity and self worth and our identification with every other person. The crux of our humanity is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind." Our Lord was quoting the Old Testament commandment in which the Hebrew word for love contains a sexual connotation. A love relationship with God is necessary to the completeness (wholeness) of our humanity. The sexual connotation not only points to this truth, but also reveals the completeness and intimacy of the believer's relationship with the Lord God. God is concerned with our entire being. He created and defined every function of our humanity.

It is vital for each individual to establish this personal relationship with God, the Creator and Redeemer, so that it becomes the primary thrust of our lives. We enter and we exit life alone. The personal intimacy of our relationship with God cannot be mediated or interpolated by any other person. We must learn to confront life as his creatures, and in terms of his expectations, in order to understand life's demands.

This basic commitment to God's authority and activity in our lives will require an habitual dying to false and secondary relationships. We must allow him preeminence, and our relationship with him must not be violated. This is essential to our sense of identity. It is the manna of life, the constancy from which we receive our perspective, our purpose and our power. It is the only thing which will save us from entanglement in confused and naive relationships. It is the only perspective that will save us from ourselves.

Having constrained us to the love of God, Jesus then sums up the remainder of the Ten Commandments with "...and love your neighbor as yourself." The cycle begins with God. Our love relationship with him teaches us to love ourselves from his perspective, as his creatures. This gives us the freedom to love ourselves and others both realistically and unselfishly. This is the only genuine love. God's unconditional love and acceptance are His gracious gift to us, purchased for us with a price we can never repay. This frees us from the futility of trying to buy favor or acceptance from God.

Receiving God's gracious gift assures us an unthreatened and validated identity. We are thus freed from the need to validate our identity through others, with the accompanying duplicity and pretense of trying to be something we are not and cannot be. Before God we need no masks. We can be who we are and rest in his acceptance, realizing that God sees us restored to his image by the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. His sacrificial death on our behalf made possible our righteous standing before God our Creator-Redeemer.

This is the only source of security and identity which is invulnerable. The marvel is "If God is for us, who can be against us!"

So the story of creation begins, and the unvarying pattern is, first the material structure, then the forms of life; first the man-of-dust, then the man-of-life; first the rib, then the "mother of all living". First Adam, and then Eve; first initiator, then nurturer. Or as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15:46,

"But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual."

Then 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 birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So 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).

From this concise and uncluttered summary of human creation we learn about the equality, the duality and mutuality of our identity as human beings. We learn of our co-dominion over the earth, and recognize that this is a delegated authority, both privilege and responsibility. Since we are made in the image of God, the purpose for our humanity is evident: we are the means by which God is to share himself with his creation. As Dorothy Sayers suggests in "Mind of the Maker", as the artist works to project himself, so God The Creator created man in his own image. This puts our humanity in perspective. God is not our creation; we are his. We cannot simply create God with our imagining. That kind of preposterous fantasy displaces the reality of the transcendent God who is unimaginable to our finite minds. The arrogant "naming of God", a presumption which has lately seized the so-called religious feminists, is the blasphemy of displacing the one and only true God with the human ego--the Potter with the clay, the Shepherd with the sheep, and--unthinkably--the Redeemer with the sinner.

We exist in order to display the character of God to his created universe. The "God-shaped vacuum" in each of us is meant to contain the very essence of life, God himself, in whom we live and move and have our being. It is this dependent relationship of creature to Creator that is the very essence and purpose of human existence. Our intrinsic value derives from the fact that we are God-designed, and that our Creator-God made us to share His Life and thereby to participate in His cosmic, redemptive plan.

In the Genesis account of creation we learn that when the Creator-God had finished the six days of creation, he rested on the seventh day. Certainly God was not compelled to rest because he was de-energized! Nor was his character, his Godness, altered or determined by his work. Rather, his character was revealed, or expressed in his work.

Since we are created in the image of God, it seems reasonable to conclude it is not our role which gives us value; rather it is who we are in terms of our relationship with God and the purpose for which he created us. Our identity is not determined by our role, or function. It is defined by the God who made us. We cannot, therefore, generate our own identity. We have value because he made us; we receive our worth from him. Our sense of failure, guilt, frustration, and lack of identity come from trying to live apart from his character, from his indwelling life. In separating ourselves from his character, we are denying our creative purpose. The consummate privilege of our humanity is our fellowship with God himself. We will love and enjoy his creation proportionate to learning the transcendent joy of loving and knowing the Creator.

The relationship between identity and role, or function, may be compared with the relationship between faith and works. There is no discrepancy between the two, but works are the result of faith, not vice versa. Works are the mode by which faith is expressed. The validity of faith is tested by works. Faith is the foundation; works the superstructure.

What faith is to works, identity is to role. Our femaleness gives us a social function, subsidiary to and dependent upon our human identity. We are essentially spiritual beings, our bodies being simply the visible evidence of that being. In God's economy, the physical, tangible elements are the parable of the essential spiritual realities. God has made the material things to picture spiritual verities. Thus, "The heavens declare the

glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork." And we, his people, demonstrate the glory of his character as we yield ourselves as those "who have been brought from death to life, and (our) members to God as instruments of righteousness."

The purpose for our human existence has, appropriately, been assigned by creative fiat. God has chosen women, as well as men, to be the bearers of his image, vessels in whom his own life is resident, life that transcends death and brings grandeur to every dimension of our humanity, as we live for the praise of our Maker. This is the factor that determines whether we will use or abuse our sexuality.

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