

I Believe in the Dignity of Humanity

Barry O'Dell

Of the creation of the human race we read, “*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*” (Gen. 1:26-27). We are then told, “*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*” (Gen. 2:7). What was said of man upon his creation was not said of any other created thing. There was something that set Adam above everything that God created in the five days prior to his creation.

Dignity is defined as, “the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect.” To be made in the image of God means that there is something within us that is common with our Creator. When warning about the use and abuse of the tongue James wrote, “*Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God*” (Jas. 3:9). The Holy Spirit chose to use the Greek term *homoiosis* which means, “a making like, resemblance.” The first man and woman were created miraculously - one from dust and the other from a rib (Gen. 2:7, 22). From that point forward, every human is conceived and born following the natural laws that God established. You and I are physically a result of those natural laws.

Here is another passage to think on: “*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*” (Ps. 8:3-5). In the physical world there is the plant kingdom, the mineral kingdom, and the animal kingdom. Above and apart from all of that there is humanity. God looked at all of His creation and called it “*very good*” (Gen. 1:31) but, only of the creation of humanity are we told that it was in the “*image of God*.” We should also remember that there is a realm of existence that cannot be realized with the five senses. Angels are a part of that

spiritual plane of existence and we are told that man is “*a little lower than the angels*.” Jesus, when He took on flesh, became “*a little lower than the angels*” (Heb. 2:9). What was it that set humanity above and apart from the rest of God’s creation? Why would God place man above everything else in His creation (Gen. 1:28)? What does it mean to be created “*in the image of God*?” I think there are two things to consider...

Man, as a being with a soul, has an innate ability to choose between right and wrong, moral and immoral. No animal can do that. Many people have a domesticated animal - a pet. Maybe a cat, maybe a dog. And we love our pets! Yet, we understand that a very fundamental difference exists between humans and animals. For example, if you have two children and one takes something from the other, he knows that there will be some kind of consequence for such behavior. Hopefully, the one who has taken something

that is not his will feel a sense of shame and dread knowing that some form of punishment will be coming. We sometimes refer to this as conscience.

However, if you have two cats and one takes a toy from the other, there is no sense of dread or remorse for stealing. A cat, or any other animal for that matter, was not created in the image of God and they do not have a conscience.

Second, man has the ability to look ahead and consider future outcomes/consequences of personal behavior. Again, as with conscience, this sets us apart from the animal kingdom. Our dogs are not conscious of a need to repent for some ill deed. They are not conscious of a future event in which Jesus will judge all of mankind. Paul told the Athenians, “*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead*” (Acts 17:30-31). Animals do not have the capability to repent because they do not have a conscience toward or consciousness of sin!

We are unique above all of God’s “*very good*” creation. We are beings with eternal souls and have been created in the similitude of God Himself. I believe in the dignity of humanity.

“...men, which are made in the similitude of God”

James 3:9

There are many people struggling in the world. There is no doubt that some people who go through struggles begin to feel disenfranchised. Also, there are those in the world who only survive by the charity of God, government, and godly people. It saddens me to no end that these people exist. I wonder why some experience life this way? To answer this query one need look no further than Holy Writ. Looking at the microcosm of Cain and Abel, we can notice the problem and the solution. In one verse God reveals His social contract, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him" (Genesis 4:7). The plight of Cain is the plight of every individual who does not honor their end of God's social contract.

THE CONTRACT

Simply put, God's contract with society is, "do well and you will be accepted." If I do not well then sin lies at that door and unto me shall be sin's desire and I shall rule over sin. In other words, my sinful action causes me to enter into a relationship with sin and the progeny of such will always be death. Similar language was used by God when He pronounced a curse on Eve, "...and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16b). We know full well the copulative nature of action and desire to bring forth sin (James 1:15). It would appear that the same type of illustrative language is being used here of a man letting in this wild beast, sin, and then having to rule over it the way Adam was to rule over Eve after the fall. So, God is saying to Cain, and subsequently to us, "honor the social contract by doing well, for if you do not, you will not be accepted and you will have entered into this copulative relationship with sin." A man doing not well will always produce more sin. Doing not well, not being accepted, producing more sin, and so on is the same spiral in which many in our society find themselves. The aforementioned spiral can be mapped with the three curses of Cain.

THE CURSES

We know that Cain broke the social contract and killed his brother. God cursed him (Genesis 4:11). God pronounced two specific curses and one implied curse which Cain inferred. The curses of Cain are still incurred today when God's social contract is broken.

The first curse expressly pronounced by God was that Cain was cursed from the earth, and that the earth would no longer yield its strength (Genesis 4:11-12a). Cain now would have to put in more work and get less results. More work and less results would have been particularly bad for Cain as he was a tiller of the

fields. Think of someone today who has made poor decisions. The fruit of the earth yields with difficulty, if at all. Take for instance, if one is a liar. It will be difficult for them to keep gainful employment, to rise through the ranks if they do, and it will be difficult for them to have a circle of friends to share the load as people generally ostracize those whom they do not trust. What if someone were a petty criminal or a general ne'er-do-well? The same would be true. They would perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage and those who "do well" to be privileged.

The second curse expressly pronounced by God was that Cain would be a fugitive and a vagabond (Genesis 4:12b). Cain would find no place to really call home. He would roam around never feeling like he fully belonged, and he did not belong in polite society since he was a murderer. The second curse here builds on the first. Because Cain would never feel like he belonged, consequently, he could never become a productive member of a community. He was forced to roam; he was always having to start over. His vagabond status would have made any success or strength the earth would have yielded hard won if garnered at all.

The third curse upon Cain was implied, and he inferred it. People would kill him when they found out what he was (Genesis 4:14). His conclusion makes an interesting lesson for us. God intervened and marked Cain so people would not kill him (Genesis 4:14). Now Cain would live out the rest of his days in misery never fitting in with a community, working harder than any man should have to work, all the while knowing the only reason he was alive is because other people chose not to kill him. Yes, Cain was alive because of the charity of God. I cannot imagine how miserable and unfulfilled his existence must have been.

CONCLUSION

People who do well, who live according to the moral guidelines found in God's Word are privileged beyond measure. People who do not well, are not privileged. Every social conflict can be brought back to this one social contract: If you do well, you will be accepted, but if you do not well, then your life is going to be a type of hell on earth. If you are struggling, disenfranchised, and living off the charity of government and/or godly people then break the cycle. Begin the arduous task of rectifying the potentially long line of bad decisions that may not have started with you. Make sure that line ends with you. Do not blame God, others, or a system for the condition in which you exist. Do well. The grace of God that has appeared unto ALL men teaches us how to do just that (Titus 2:11-13).

Have you ever wondered why there is so much pain and suffering in the world? Many atheists, skeptics, or agnostics use suffering to discredit or disprove the existence of God. However, they fail to account for the fact that there is another being that exists that loves to cause pain and suffering - Satan. In this world we cannot have good without evil. Some people seem to want to believe in God and not in the devil. If our faith is based upon the scriptures then we are forced to conclude that Satan is real, and I, for one, believe in him. The first time we read of the devil is in Genesis 3. This chapter is among some of the most known passages of scripture. The first six verses contain what is commonly called the fall of man. In these verses we learn a lot about how Satan operates. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:11, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." We need to remind ourselves of the fact that we have an adversary. He is doing everything he can to lead us to hell. We must not be ignorant of how Satan works.

The first thing the devil often tries to do is deceive people into thinking that breaking the commands of God is acceptable. In Genesis 3:1 we read, "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made." The word "subtil" is translated as "cunning" in the New King James Version and means "crafty". Satan has an unparalleled ability to create lies that most anyone would believe. Unfortunately that is exactly what happened to Eve. Notice what followed, "And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die..." One word was all that it took to deceive Eve into breaking the command of God. Deception is one of Satan's most powerful tools. In fact, Jesus said, "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44). Satan is real and he is trying to deceive us into thinking that he is not. As recorded in Genesis three, he took advantage of Eve's weakness and ignorance. He does the exact same thing today. Why are there so many churches, religions, theologies and philosophies? Because men are ignorant of the truth of God and Satan has lead them into a lie. This is why study is so important to the life of a Christian. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15). How hard is it for

someone to convince you of a lie when you already know the truth? If we prepare ourselves with knowledge we can better withstand the deceptions the devil may throw at us.

This, however, is not the only device Satan uses. When you look at the world, and more specifically, the church, many people are incredibly discouraged. Have you ever been really excited to start a new hobby? Let's say painting for example. You get your canvases, paints, and brushes. You get home to try it out expecting to be the next Bob Ross, or Picasso but when you get done it looks like something your child would have painted for you in kindergarten. What happens to that excitement? Most likely it fades a little, perhaps dies all together. Discouragement is such a powerful thing. I believe this is something the devil uses to his advantage. "It's just too hard." "I'm not any good at it." "I keep trying and trying but always fail." How many times have we heard things like this? The sad thing is, that is how Satan wants us to feel about serving Christ. For example, Matthew 19:16-22 depicts a wealthy young man asking Jesus what is required for eternal life. To which Christ responded, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me." (v. 21). What did the young man do? "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." (v. 22). This young man was discouraged because he would have to give up his wealth. To our knowledge, he was so discouraged that he never obeyed the gospel. I fully believe that Satan exists. I also believe that he uses discouragement to deter us from following God. That is why the Hebrews writer said, "But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13). Though discouragement is very powerful, encouragement is much more powerful. This is something that the Christians in the first century understood far better than we do. We ought to be encouraging our brethren as much as we can because Satan is doing everything he can to discourage them. The church at Thessalonica is a great example of this. Notice what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." The church there was already encouraging one another yet Paul commanded them to continue. Why? Encouragement is crucial to living the Christian life. Though much more can and should be said on this topic, I hope and pray that this has reminded us of the reality of Satan. Let us not be ignorant of our adversary.

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- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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