

Teaching Messiah According to Scripture: Genesis Lesson 07 – True Fellowship: Eve’s Community

By Andy Witt (October 2008)

As we mentioned in last week’s lesson, this week we are going to be talking about biblical fellowship. In particular, we are going to talk about it in relation to the Image of God.

Review: Mankind’s role in the Garden, and the Garden as a Gift

We made much of Genesis 2:15 last time we met. We did so because this verse is crucial for a proper doctrine on humanity. In this verse we find not only the purpose statement for man prior to the Fall, but also the state of man’s nature and relationship with God prior to it. Over this past week, as I’ve given thought to some of the things we’ve talked about, I was able to formulate a summary statement of 2:15 (I call it Andy’s Amplified Version): “God caused the man to rest in the Garden, and, intending him to continue in that rest, rested him for the purpose of worshipping and obeying.”¹ The end of man, as Westminster rightly contends, is to worship God and enjoy Him forever.² The end of man is not *work*, but worship.

Man was to worship God and obey Him in the Garden of Eden. As we made special note of in Genesis 1, this place which God was preparing for Adam and Eve to dwell was a *very good* place (Gen 1.31). It was created just for mankind, where man had peace and rest with God, with land, and with each other. In other words, it was a ‘good’ place for man to dwell. How we define good in these beginning chapters of the Bible is crucial to how we understand the Fall of Man in chapter three. Like other biblical words, we should seek to define it by its actual use in Scripture. Luckily for us, the word for good (*tov*), is used much in Genesis 1. Each day is good in how it makes the land more suitable for mankind to reside in. Thus, something is seen as good when it is seen to benefit mankind. We can define good, then, as “that which is beneficial for mankind.”

The Image of God: From Good to Not Good to Very Good!

As William Dyrness notes, “Persons are made ultimately to praise God and to find their highest end in that praise. This end is the supreme meaning of creation *in the image of God*. Human life is a unique

¹ The reasons behind this translation are all in Lesson 6.

² I also think John Piper makes a great argument to rephrase Westminster as “to worship God *by* enjoying Him.” See his book *Desiring God* for a fuller explanation.

sense is a divine gift, meant to reflect in some way the character of God himself.” In what way man reflects this has been the subject of debate among Christian theologians for quite some time.

The simple answer is to agree with Calvin that “man is called God’s image because he is like God.”³ He went on to note, “Although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not flow....From this we may gather that when his image is placed in man a tacit antithesis is introduced which raises man above all other creatures and, as it were, separates him from the common mass.”⁴ In the end, Calvin sees the image of God primarily as “an inner good of the soul” which “was visible in the light of the mind, in the uprightness of the heart, and in the soundness of all the parts.”⁵ Such a definition of the Image of God is certainly on target.

One member of the class gave a great illustration of the Image of God that is helpful in thinking about the two natures of the discussion. He likened the image of God to a picture. In photography, a three-dimensional object is imagined onto a medium, which represents the three-dimensional object in only two dimensions. The object’s representation, though it looks much like the object, is not the actual object. It is a flattened representation of the real object. In a similar way, there is a depth and vastness to God that is far beyond anything in mankind. Mankind, even in his great complexity, is only an image of the greatness and glory of God. This analogy helps because it raises two questions: 1) What exactly in mankind ‘images’ God? That is, what about mankind’s nature that imitates God’s nature? 2) What is the significance of this imaging?

Christopher H. J. Wright observes that since the Bible never explicitly defines ‘the image’, we probably cannot do so in any precise manner.⁶ We can, however, observe what the Bible does say.

The Image in Genesis 1:26-31

In this passage we have one of the main descriptions of the Image of God. It relates this image most closely to dominion over the creatures of the land, but also relates the Image to mankind as ‘male and female’ and their blessing to fill the land and subdue it. Most significant is the poem in 1.27 which describes the creation of mankind. An interpretative translation would understand it as saying, “God created man in his own image; that is, in the image of God he created him; that is, male and female he created them.” Thus, to ‘create man in his own image’ literally means that God created mankind male

³ John Calvin, *Institutes*, §1.15.3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, §1.15.3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, §1.15.4.

⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 421.

and female. The difficulty, as noted, is that God is not a physical being, but a spiritual one. We typically think about the Image as the physical likeness of mankind to the spiritual God, but I think Calvin was right in locating the likeness of God primarily as an inward good – an inward, spiritual similarity between mankind and his Maker.

The apostle Paul seems to substantiate this understanding of the Image in Colossians 1.18, where Paul speaks of God’s beloved Son as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”⁷ There, Paul is not describing Jesus, but identifying a reference. In other words, the Son (Jesus) is *the* Image of God (Gen 1.27) and the firstborn of all creation (Gen 1.1). If this is the case, then the Image of God is a person, and mankind being made in the image of God is mainly about *personhood*. Personhood is the ‘godness’ of mankind, completely unlike any other creature that God has made. Wright has written,

We should not so much think of the image of God as an independent “thing” that we somehow possess. God did not *give* to human being the image of God. Rather, it is a dimension of our very creation. The expression “in our image” is adverbial (that is, it describes the way God made us), not adjectival (that is, as if it simply described a quality we possess). The image of God is not so much something we *possess*, as *what we are*. *To be human is to be the image of God*. It is not an extra feature added on to our species; it is definitive of what it means to be human.⁸

This is why Calvin’s identification with spiritual dimensions within man is important. Calvin also left room for the physical part of man to in some way reflect God’s image, even though he did not write much on how it did. The physical likeness of man to God will be subject of the rest of our study today. It begins in Genesis 1.26.

In this passage God speaks to himself in the plural, “Let us create man in our image, according to our likeness.” This plural reference of God to himself has the topic of much dispute, though it can only refer to God, not angelic beings. The interesting part is that Moses refers to God in the singular, “In the image of God he created him” (1.27). Expressing this plurality is the fact that God created mankind in his image by creating mankind “male and female.” One could make the case that it is only with community that the image of God can most fully manifest itself. In this regard, it is interesting that God blessed humanity, working together as Image Bearers, to build community. They are to make more people (‘be fruitful and multiply), and build a community throughout the land (‘fill the land and subdue it’). Though these are imperatives, it is important not to view them as commands. This is because they

⁷ See the handout which accompanies this document on the website an interesting look into how Paul was picking up on the elevated style of Genesis 1 and the parallelistic syntax of Genesis 1.1 and 1.27.

⁸ Wright, *Mission of God*, 421. See also his intriguing comments on 172-173.

are blessings. The first command is noted in 2.16, not here. Here, man is blessed to multiply and fill the land. There is, then, a focus on the image as plurality in Genesis 1.26-31.

The Image in Genesis 2:4-24

The focus in Genesis 2 is not on the plurality of the image, but on the unity of it. It is clearly seen in how Adam and Eve become 'one flesh' at the high point of the story. Before we get there, though, we need to look at how this unity is brought to a focus in the chapter.

In 2.7-8 we have a recounting of how Adam is formed from the dust of the ground. From this we learn that being *in the image* does not mean that man is divine. God did not create a *divine* man, but one in the image of the divine. Mankind kind is a God-image, different than all the rest of creation. Man is not 'heavenly creature' though, but part of creation, out of the dust of the ground. The specialness of Adam is seen in how God provides for him. God makes a good Garden for Adam, gives Adam the 'breath of life' to make him a living creature, and also made trees for Adam's food. He also causes Adam to rest in the Garden (2.15).

In 2.18, though, we find something we might not have expected: it is not good for man to be alone. This is the first time something in Scripture is labeled 'not good'. Following our definition from earlier, this would be that it was not beneficial for man that he should be alone. In other words, it meant that he would not be able to best worship God and obey Him by being alone. There was something lacking, and it was a helper.

To make it "very good" (1.31), God was to make a helper fit form Adam. From the story (2.18-23) we can see that God brings particular animals before Adam so that he can name them. Adam does so, but he does not find any other them which correspond to him. Does this correspondence a physical one, or a spiritual one. As before, we think it is more of a spiritual one. The correspondence that Adam seeks is not one where he 'fits' together physically with a woman, but one where he can interact with another human being in a personal relationship. This implies that Adam could not find such a fit in the animal kingdom, since mankind is a distinct (special) creature, unlike all other creatures. Personhood is what is being sought after. Remember, the Image/Likeness is about being a Person. Adam was simply looking for personal interaction, fellowship.

Along these line we also need to sharpen our thinking about the 'helper' aspect of this one who corresponds to Adam. Man people think that this helper is synonymous with a woman/wife, and often such a view minimizes the role of the woman, making it a derogatory word. The truth could not be farther from such a view. In fact, the term here for helper is used elsewhere in the OT to describe God,

in how He is a helper of Israel (c.f. Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29). Likewise, the term is not a gender word, describing the role of woman; rather, the 'helper' is meant for humanity. The 'helper' is simply a partner so that Adam is no longer by himself. A man can be a helper to another man, and a woman can be a helper to another woman. In other words, God *could have created another man* to be with Adam, and that man could have been Adam's helpmate. However, God did not create another man, but build a woman out of man's side.

From this we can gather that it was not good for man to rest alone. This helper was to help man in his worshipping and obeying, to continue in the rest of God. In regards to worship, this helper enabled Adam to praise God. For praise to exist there needs to be three parties: God, the worshipper, and the audience (to hear the worshipper praise God). Praise is not thankfulness, but the acknowledgment of God. Many do not acknowledge this difference between praise and worship, but it is important biblically. Worship is thankfulness in response to the Word of God; praise is the lifting up of God before other people, the acknowledgement of God at work in the world. In fact, in modern 'worship' we use the Hebrew phrases all wrong. For example, there is the word *hallelujah*. This word literally means "all of you praise God." It is used in Scripture to cause those who hear it to lift up God's name. We often sing it with our eyes closed and directed toward God. In effect, we are singing that God would praise himself – which is meaningless.

In any case, this helper was to help the man worship God, obey Him, and continue in God's rest. The main way we can do that today in our churches is by taking the unity of the body seriously. Ephesians 4 and Romans 12 are two passages which call us all to function together. We cannot grow spiritually when we are alone – we need the church to grow up. The Church, then, is part of God's program to restore humanity back to Genesis 2:15.

The prime picture of such unity is in the institution of marriage, where a man and a woman become one flesh. Such a marriage is the supreme example of Christ and the Church. In our passage, God 'builds' Eve for this specific purpose. Later in Genesis Sarah will 'build' a family, as God 'built' Eve. The notion of marriage is as an institution that God has built. The Church and marriage are the only two divine institutions – both are 'built' by God (c.f. Matt 16:18).

In the marriage of man and woman ('becoming one flesh') we have the physical image of God, in unity. The plurality of mankind (male and female) becomes a unity in their intimate, personal relationship, which is the exact way God's unity is described in Deuteronomy 6:4. The oneness of God in that verse leaves open the possibility of diversity in oneness – just as man and woman are one in marriage.