



SESSION 1

BASIC DOCTRINES 2: THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

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“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

1 Timothy 4:16

What is Biblical Christianity?

- Bible-based – recognizes the Bible as the supreme authority of God and complete revelation from God.
- Orthodox – accepts the early Christian creeds (statement of beliefs, pre-Roman Catholic).
- Evangelical – adheres to the tenets of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

How Do We Know If A Person Or Group Is Biblically Christian?

What they believe & teach regarding the following:

Authority – Is there a person or thing that is placed equal to or above the Bible? (supposedly “none”)

God – Biblical Christianity is Trinitarian. Is God recognized as one God at the same time three distinct but equal Persons? (supposedly “yes”)

- Jesus incarnate is both fully God and truly human, yet sinless.

Salvation – Man cannot save himself. Christ’s finished work on the cross saves him when he puts his personal trust (faith) in Jesus, apart from works and other saviors.

I. Why Humans Were Created

A. God created us for His own glory

God speaks of his sons and daughters from the ends of the earth as those “whom I created for my glory” (Isaiah 43:7; cf. Ephesians 1:11–12). Therefore, we are to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This fact guarantees that our lives are significant. Scripture tells us that we were created to glorify God, indicating that we are important to God himself. This is the final definition of genuine importance or significance to our lives: If we are truly important to God for all eternity, then what greater measure of importance or significance could we want?

B. Man’s purpose in life is to glorify God

What is our purpose in life? Our purpose must be to fulfill the reason that God created us: to glorify him. When we are speaking with respect to God himself, that is a good summary of our purpose. But when we think of our own interests, we make the happy discovery that we are to enjoy God and take delight in him and in our relationship to him. Jesus says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). David tells God, “In your presence there is fullness of joy in your right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11). He longs to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, “to behold the beauty of the LORD” As we glorify God and enjoy him, Scripture tells us that he rejoices in us. (Isaiah 62:5; Zephaniah 3:17–18).

II. The Origin of Humanity (Views)

A. Atheistic Evolution

The origin of man, animals, and plant life is all explained apart from God or any supernatural process.

B. Theistic Evolution

Theistic evolution is the teaching that plants, animals, and man gradually evolved from lower forms, but that God supervised the process.

C. Progressive Creationism

(Also called the day-age theory) rejects a literal six-day creation but the days were equivalent to geological ages. It is a more serious attempt to reconcile the Bible with science. Progressive creationists acknowledge the direct creation of man and general species in consideration of Genesis 1-2.

D. Gap Theory

The gap theory places a lengthy period of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, basically as an accommodation to science. Millions of years took place between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, in agreement with scientific evaluation concerning the age of the earth.

E. Fiat Creation

(Literal twenty-four-hour days) - God created directly and instantaneously in literal twenty-four-hour days . All forms of evolution are rejected by fiat creationists.

III. The “Image of God” in Humans

A. The Meaning of “Image of God”

1. Views summarizing the meaning of the “Image of God”
 - **Substantive** – identifies some particular quality of man (such as reason or spirituality) as being the image of God in man
 - **Relational** – relational views, which held that the image of God had to do with our interpersonal relationships, specifically in our being created as male and female

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- **Functional** – which holds that the image of God has to do with a function we carry out, usually our exercise of dominion over the creation

2. Specific Aspects of Our Likeness to God

- **Moral Aspects**

We are creatures who are morally accountable before God for our actions. We have an inner sense of right and wrong that sets us apart from animals (who have little if any innate sense of morality or justice but simply respond from fear of punishment or hope of reward). When we act according to God's moral standards, our likeness to God is reflected in behavior that is holy and righteous before him, but, by contrast, our unlikeness to God is reflected whenever we sin.

- **Spiritual Aspects**

We have not only physical bodies but also immaterial spirits, and we can therefore act in ways that are significant in the immaterial, spiritual realm of existence. This means that we have a spiritual life that enables us to relate to God as persons, to pray and praise him, and to hear him speaking his words to us. Connected with this spiritual life is the fact that we have immortality; we will not cease to exist but will live forever.

- **Mental Aspects**

We have an ability to reason and think logically and learn that sets us apart from the animal world. We continue to develop greater skill and complexity in technology, in agriculture, in science, and in nearly every field of endeavor. Our use of complex, abstract language sets us far apart from the animals.

Another mental difference between humans and animals is that we have an awareness of the distant future, even an inward sense that we will live beyond the time of our physical death, a sense that gives many people a desire to attempt to be right with God before they die (God “has put eternity into man’s mind,” Ecclesiastes 3:11). Our likeness to God is also seen in our human creativity in areas such as art, music, and literature, and in scientific and technological inventiveness. In the area of emotions, our likeness to God is seen in a large difference in degree and complexity of emotions. But in the complexity of emotions that we experience, once again we are far different than the rest of creation.

- **Relational Aspects**

In addition to our unique ability to relate to God, there are other relational aspects of being in God’s image. We have a sense of community with each other, the depth of interpersonal harmony experienced in human marriage, in a human family when it functions according to God’s principles, and in a church when a community of believers is walking in fellowship with the Lord and with each other. In marriage itself we reflect the nature of God in the fact that as men and women we have equality in importance but difference in roles from the time that God created us. Man is like God also in his relationship to the rest of creation. Specifically, man has been given the right to rule over the creation and when Christ returns will even be given authority to sit in judgment over angels (1 Corinthians 6:3; Genesis 1:26, 28; Psalm 8:6–8).

- **Physical Aspects**

Our bodies reflect something of God’s own character. The Bible speaks of qualities that we share with God such as seeing, hearing and speaking. Our senses of taste and

touch and smell give us the ability to understand and enjoy God’s creation, reflecting the fact that God himself understands and enjoys his creation, though in a far greater sense than we do.

Our physical bodies are a very important part of our existence and, as transformed when Christ returns, they will continue to be part of our existence for all eternity (see 1 Corinthians 15:43–45, 51–55). Our bodies therefore have been created by God as suitable instruments to represent in a physical way our human nature, which has been made to be like God’s own nature. In fact, almost everything we do is done by means of the use of our physical bodies — our thinking, our moral judgments, our prayer and praise, our demonstrations of love and concern for each other — all are done using the physical bodies God has given us. And certainly the God-given physical ability to bear and raise children who are like ourselves (see Genesis 5:3) is a reflection of God’s own ability to create human beings who are like himself.

B. Humans as Male and Female

Humans were created with two sexes (male and female). As we explore the Scriptures, we can see some significance and valuable insights as we look into the creation of humans as male and female.

1. Interpersonal unity

We are not to be isolated persons, but God designed us to attain interpersonal unity of various sorts in all forms of human society. Interpersonal unity can be especially deep in the human family and also in our spiritual family, the church. Between men and women, interpersonal unity comes to its fullest expression in this age in marriage, where husband and wife become, in a sense, two persons in one. (Gen. 2:24).

This unity is not only a physical unity; it is also a spiritual and emotional unity of profound dimensions. A husband and wife joined together in marriage are people that “God has joined together” (Matthew 19:6, 1 Corinthians 6:16, 18–20, 1 Corinthians 7:3–5, Ephesians 5:28). The union between husband and wife is not temporary but lifelong (Malachi 2:14–16; Romans 7:2), and it is not trivial but is a profound relationship created by God in order to picture the relationship between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:23–32).

2. Reflection of the plurality of persons within the Trinity

God created two distinct persons as male and female in order to reflect to some degree the plurality of persons within the Trinity. In the verse prior to the one that tells of our creation as male and female, we see the first explicit indication of a plurality of persons within God: “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion” (Genesis 1:26). Just as there was fellowship and communication and sharing of glory among the members of the Trinity before the world was made (see John 17:5, 24) so God made Adam and Eve in such a way that they would share love and communication and mutual giving of honor to one another in their interpersonal relationship.

Marriage is not the only way in which the unity and diversity in the Trinity can be reflected in our lives. It is also reflected in the union of believers in the fellowship of the church — and in genuine church fellowship, single persons (like Paul and Jesus) as well as those who are married can have interpersonal relationships that reflect the nature of the Trinity. Therefore, building the church and increasing its unity and purity also promote the reflection of God’s character in the world.

3. Equality in personhood and importance

Just as the members of the Trinity are equal in their importance and in their full existence as distinct persons (see chapter 14, above), so men and women have been created by God to be equal in their importance and personhood. When God created man, he created both “male and female” in his image (Genesis 1:27; 5:1–2). Men and women are made equally in God’s image and both men and women reflect God’s character in their lives. This means that we should see aspects of God’s character reflected in each other’s lives. If we lived in a society consisting of only Christian men or a society consisting of only Christian women, we would not gain as full a picture of the character of God as when we see both godly men and godly women in their complementary differences together reflecting the beauty of God’s character.

Both men and women are God’s image bearers, then certainly men and women are equally important to God and equally valuable to him. We have equal worth before Him for all eternity. All are equally valuable to God and should be equally valuable to one another as well. In the old covenant, the sign of membership of God’s people was circumcision, which was given only to men. The new sign of membership of God’s people, the sign of baptism, given to both men and women, is further evidence that both should be seen as fully and equally members of the people of God. Equality in status among God’s people is also emphasized by Paul in Galatians: “...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27–28).

C. Man in the “Image of God”

1. The Fall: God’s Image is Distorted but not Lost

Even though men are sinful, there is still enough likeness to God remaining in them that to murder another person (Genesis 9:6, to “shed blood” is an Old Testament expression

for taking a human life) is to attack the part of creation that most resembles God, and it betrays an attempt or desire (if one were able) to attack God himself. Man is still in God's image. The New Testament gives confirmation to this when James 3:9 says that men generally, not just believers, "are made in the likeness of God."

However, since man has sinned, he is certainly not as fully like God as he was before. His moral purity has been lost and his sinful character certainly does not reflect God's holiness. His intellect is corrupted by falsehood and misunderstanding; his speech no longer continually glorifies God; his relationships are often governed by selfishness rather than love, and so forth. Though man is still in the image of God, in every aspect of life some parts of that image have been distorted or lost. In short, "God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices" (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

After the fall, then, we are still in God's image — we are still like God and we still represent God — but the image of God in us is distorted; we are less fully like God than we were before the entrance of sin. Before the fall, Adam and Eve together with all that God had made was "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

2. Redemption in Christ: A progressive recovering of more of God's Image

Our redemption in Christ means that we can, even in this life, progressively grow into more and more likeness to God. For example, Paul says that as Christians we have a new nature that is "being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:10). As we gain in true understanding of God, his Word, and his world, we begin to think more and more of the thoughts that God himself thinks. In this way we are "renewed in knowledge" and we become more like God in our thinking. This is a description of the ordinary course of the Christian life. So Paul also can say that we "are being changed into his likeness [lit. "image," Gk. εἰκών from one degree of

glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Throughout this life, as we grow in Christian maturity we grow in greater likeness to God. More particularly, we grow in likeness to Christ in our lives and in our character. In fact, the goal for which God has redeemed us is that we might be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29) and thus be exactly like Christ in our moral character.

3. At Christ’s return: Complete Restoration of God’s Image

The amazing promise of the New Testament is that just as we have been like Adam (subject to death and sin), we shall also be like Christ (morally pure, never subject to death again): “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:49). The full measure of our creation in the image of God is not seen in the life of Adam who sinned, nor is it seen in our lives now, for we are imperfect. But the New Testament emphasizes that God’s purpose in creating man in his image was completely realized in the person of Jesus Christ. He himself “is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4 NASB); “He is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). In Jesus we see human likeness to God as it was intended to be, and it should cause us to rejoice that God has predestined us “to be *conformed to the image of his son*” (Romans 8:29; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:49): “When he appears we *shall be like him*” (1 John 3:2). The full measure of the excellence of our humanity will not be seen again in life on earth until Christ returns and we have obtained all the benefits of the salvation He earned for us.

IV. Implications of the “Image of God” in Humans

- A. We have the privilege of bearing the image of God. We are the culmination of God’s infinitely wise and skillful work of creation. We are more like our Creator than all of God’s creation.
- B. We belong to God. Commitment, devotion, love, loyalty and service to God are proper responses for those who bear the image of God.
- C. We should pattern ourselves after Jesus, who is the complete revelation of what the image of God is.
- D. We experienced full humanity only when we are properly related to God.
- E. The human being is valuable. The sacredness of human life is an extremely important principle in God’s scheme of things.
- F. The Image is universal in mankind. It means that there is dignity to being humans.
- G. Every single human being, even if he is still a non-believer, has the status of being in God’s image and therefore must be treated with the dignity and respect that is due to God’s image-bearer.

NOTES

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