

Understanding Man, Part 3 1-22-17 *The Image of God*

We are in week three of our study called, *Understanding Man*. We have studied the origin of man and the purpose of man and today we explore the perplexing question, "Did Adam have a belly-button?" Oh no, I'm sorry, that's for a later study. Today we look at the subject of *man - the image of God*. We begin today with the verse we started with last week 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." 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* So, we see from this that man was made in God's image. It was this that made him special. It was this that made him distinct from all the animals. Man was higher, man was special because of God's image. But then along came Genesis 3, the serpent and man's fall into sin. Question: Did man or did man not lose the image of God when he fell? The Scriptures teach that God's image in man was damaged by the fall, so that Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 teach that our sanctification as believers restores that image. But I carefully said that God's image was damaged, not destroyed; tarnished, not eradicated. Man still is God's image. Take a look at Genesis chapter nine. This becomes our main textual base for today. It is post-flood. Genesis 9:**1** *God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."* We've heard that before in Genesis one. 9:**2-3** *"The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. 3 Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant."* This sounds somewhat like God's word to Adam in the creation mandate that we studied last week. **4-6** *Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man.6 Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man."*

Alright, God here lays down a law of human government, a law of retribution that says, "Whoever kills a man should himself be killed by man." Just over a week ago, in a highly-publicized case, Dylan Roof was given the death penalty for his murder of nine at the church in Charleston. Should Bible-loving believers be okay with that? Under certain conditions, yes. The principle behind it is right here, but the thing for you to see is why God ordains capital punishment.

6 *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.* Now if man had lost God's image back in Genesis 3, this would make no sense. But God says, "No man and no beast will be allowed to destroy a human being because that human being is **My** image. And if someone does, I empower human government to end his life." Because of God's image, now, present tense, post-fall. Okay? So you see that, still, man, all men and all women are fashioned in God's image. That's point and proposition #1.

Proposition #2 is that man is of value; he has intrinsic worth because he is God's image. Again, God's rationale for capital punishment, which is affirmed in both old and new testaments, is based on this idea. The life of man is of great value and worth because he is God's image. Therefore, one who destroys that life deserves to lose his own. Capital punishment is not anti-life, it is a pro-life position, rooted in a pro-God position. It is built on the Biblical teaching of the value of human life - often referred to as the sanctity of life. Because human life is a special creation of God and is meant to reflect God's image it is of supreme value.

Now, basically, most all of us grew up believing that human life is precious. We view homicide as the greatest of crimes. We abhor it, especially if it threatens **us**. We tend to value human life above all else; but really this is a largely western concept, derived from the Bible and Jewish-Christian teaching. It is not so all over the world. In Far Eastern countries human life is not so valued. People are often left out to die and where Hinduism reigns cows roam the streets where humans starve. Because bovine life is more sacred than human life, and the concept of reincarnation naturally reduces the seriousness of death, there human life is not the big deal we make it out to be. Still, even in the lands affected by the Judeo-Christian view of life we have seen an erosion of the Biblical view of man largely resulting from atheistic evolutionism. If man came from slime and is returning to slime what worth does he have? If you don't survive - you weren't fit enough to survive. Imagine the type of ethics that came out of that world view. It is a fact that such a view of man fueled the philosophy of Hitler's Germany. The holocaust was just a way to speed up the evolution of man. The evolutionary view of man obliterated the sanctity of life, tore away respect for human life and laid the foundation not only for Hitler's Germany but Stalin's Russia and Mao's China. And lest you think it only happens far away, evolutionary theory also supports the modern rise of abortion, infanticide and euthanasia right here in the USA. A low view of human life is also part and parcel to much of the environmental movement. Dr. Charles Wurster, former chief scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund speaking about malaria said: *People are the cause of all the problems. We have too many of them. We need to get rid of some of them, and*

malaria is as good a way as any." William Aiken wrote: "*Massive human diebacks would be good. It is our duty to cause them. It is our species' duty, relative to the whole, to eliminate 90 percent of our numbers.*" Former National Park Service research biologist David Graber opined, "*Human happiness is not as important as a wild and healthy planet. We have become a plague upon ourselves and upon the Earth...Some of us can only hope for the right virus to come along.*" These flow out of a certain view of humanity. Newsmen speak and write about man's inhumanity to man. They tell us we're shamefully acting like animals yet they fail to point out that our eighth grade biology book said that is **exactly** what we are and our humanity is therefore meaningless. It is best we build our view of man not on the changing opinions of men but on the sure and certain word of God which teaches that man is of great value because he is God's image. The Scriptures speak with great vigor against immoral persons and liars, and drunkards and blasphemers, but it also says that each of these is worthy of respect, a person of value, the tarnished, but very real image of God. Because of that do you know that you are more than a protein-based life form? Do you know that you are not cheap trash? Do you know your life has meaning and purpose and worth, that you are somebody? Proposition #2: Man is of value because he is God's image.

Proposition #3 is this: Because man is God's image, how you treat man is parallel to how you treat God. Now this only makes sense. If you are a fan of Sidney Crosby you're not going to put his picture on your dartboard. Instead you frame his picture and put it on your wall. You treat it with dignity because it is his image you see - a dead image - but still you treat it well. In the same way one is hardly consistent to honor God and at the same time defame or abuse his image. In the New Testament, we see James, applying in a very practical way, the Biblical doctrine of man. James 3 is about the power of the tongue **8-10** *But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.* This is applied theology. James says it is inconsistent for you to come to church and sing praise to God, and then go home and scream at your kids or cuss at the guy in the next car or badmouth your boss because when you do that you are abusing God's image. *9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.* "Hey, dufus would you shut up, I'm trying to worship God over here!" *10c These things ought not to be this way.* May the Spirit of God wing that verse like a flaming arrow straight to your heart and mine! Up till now you've said, "Yes, yes, yes" to what the

preacher has said. Are you ready now to embrace what this truth means for your life and your conduct?

God our Lord says you cannot divorce your treatment of God from your treatment of persons. Persons, who in spite of sin, still bear God's image. You see, this separation between how we relate to God and how we relate to man was common in the idolatrous religions of the Old Testament. The worshippers of Baal could stab their own neighbor and then bring their sacrifices to their God. How you treated your neighbor was not relevant to your religion. The God of Israel taught otherwise. The prophet Amos hit the people of Israel hard for their failure to care for the weak in their midst. He said theirs was a land of injustice and cruelty where the weak were mistreated and abused. Nevertheless, like the man in James 3, they still went to church. They were religious people. And they thought that would make it all fine with God. Do you remember the baptism scene from the original Godfather movie? It depicts Michael Corleone with his family in church. Their child is being baptized and simultaneously, the Corleone thugs are out committing several murders. Just business of course. I remember too an old ad campaign for Subway restaurants. These ads featured people doing very naughty things and then excusing them by saying, "It's okay. I ate at Subway." The idea is that eating at Subway is such a good thing, that it compensates for a very bad thing. Lots of people approach their religion that way, and think that if they can just do God a favor He will overlook what else they do. The idea is, "It's okay to cheat that vendor, to make fun of that person, to abuse my spouse. I went to church." This Subway-Godfather theology is very popular. But let's see how God responds to a people who are religious but unloving. Amos 5:**21-24** *I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. 22 Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. 23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. 24 "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* The message of the book of Amos is that how you treat men is tied up with how you treat God. Why? Man is God's image. You feel it's wrong when **you** are treated like an animal, like a beast of burden; and it is! You are God's image. But so is your neighbor. There is a sense in which I can say that any encounter with another human being is an encounter with God. Any encounter with another human being is, indirectly, an encounter with God. That's heavy! Jesus said specifically that how you treat believers is how you treat him Matthew 25:**40** *Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.* Christ identifies with His people But even beyond

the family of God there is a sense in which you confront God in everyone who bears His image. So, how you treat your fellow man is parallel to how you treat God himself? **That** is Proposition #3 and **that** has some very profound application to your life.

Our application is that you are to treat all men with dignity and respect. Now before you say, "Oh sure" and close your ears, listen up. Somewhere, I bet that like me, you, are failing. I bet someone in your life is being dealt with by you as so much rubbish, as a big nuisance, or as the brunt of your scorn. Listen now - I'm gonna go thru a list of those we tend not to treat with proper respect and you see if God doesn't have a word for you.

First of all, there are those of different race. Historically, American anglos have said to the image of God framed in black that you aren't worth much, to the back of the bus with you. Whatever your race, you need to take care to treat all races as God's image. Red, brown, yellow, black and white they are precious in His sight. Are they precious in yours? The real problem with racism is not that someone is despising another race. It is that they are despising the image of God. Honoring that image has meant for some of us the step of adoption, and adoption is more often than not across racial lines. Wow, adoption is a terrific application of this study isn't it?

Brothers, do you treat women with dignity and respect? Starting with your wife, and going on to the girl at your job and your waitress. Do you join the boys at work or school numbering and labeling the women according to physical attractiveness? You young men, do you refer to some girls and women as *dogs* or whatever the hip term is these days? You think light of it - I know I did when I was a teen - but I see now that it is not just "locker-room" talk, it is sheer wickedness! We call such talk "dehumanizing" and that is what it is. When you treat a woman in that way you have made her to be less than God says she is. He made man in his image, male and female! Do you treat all women with honor, with respect for the One whose likeness they bear? Why is there a feminist movement in our country? Partly because **some** women, treated as second rate by **some** men, are seeking status symbols to make up for the put-downs they get in the world. Guys, make sure they don't get them from us.

Then there are those people who, for lack of a better term, I would call "the unlovely." They are either physically or socially unattractive to us. Do you treat them differently? I heard James Dobson talk about his daughter and how when she was small she was so cute and everyone would comment about her in the grocery store and tell her how cute she was and give her candy. But then he said one day she was running through the house and tripped and fell, hitting the edge of a coffee table right between her nose and mouth, putting a terrible gash in her face; and it really

looked ugly for quite a while because it distorted her whole face. Dobson says he noticed from that point on that people no longer said anything about his daughter. They didn't come up and hug her and tell her she was cute anymore. But friends, it is those who aren't so cute who most need the attention and the smiles and the hugs. And remember, they are just as beautiful to God who looks on the heart. The image of God has nothing to do with broad shoulders, and shapely form and a classic face. Cute or not, socially together or not, those who bear God's image are worthy of respect. And since we know they won't all get it in the world at large, we in the church need to be especially on our toes to honor those the world never will. Romans 12:**16** *Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.* This is God's command to us. Esteem those who are lowly, whether that is lowly in appearance or social standing, or knowledge. Again, maybe the ultimate application of this idea is adoption or foster care. And the key to this is understanding the gospel of Christ which tells us we are beloved of God. God's son died for us, so we don't have to be advancing ourselves socially. We are King's kids. Our status is secure and we are free to love the less-attractive with confidence that God will care for us, and without regard for what others may think.

Moving on, there are several other groups who are often treated poorly because they are weak. How do you deal with people who are under you? In the family or at work. One of the great struggles we have in our land is between labor and management. And maybe the problems between these two groups results from lack of respect. R.C. Sproul wrote a wonderful book called *The Wayne Alderson Story*. Alderson was in management with a Pittsburgh area steel mill that experienced typical labor unrest. Alderson felt the basic problem was that the workers were treated like cattle instead of men. He went on a one-man campaign to show respect for the men at that plant and encourage respect in others. He shook hands with the men as they left, said thank-you, asked about family, showed up to visit them in the hospital, prayed for them. The plant was turned upside down and worker efficiency tripled. CBS even sent out a crew to make a film about what happened. The film was called *The Miracle at Pittron*, and from it, Alderson launched a nationwide program for businesses with seminars and such called, get this, *The Value of the Person*. What I've laid before you today is no dry theology, it is the crying need of our world. The working man who screws the bulb in the headlight of your car needs respect and we have reason to give it to him. Do you get respect from those over you? Do you give it to those under you?

A similar story to Alderson's was told by Bill Sands, a former hard-core prisoner whose life was changed by a warden who one day shocked the prison, over which he had just been given

charge, by walking thru the grounds unarmed and unaccompanied except for his wife. He came thru shaking hands, asking about the men, and these guys were shocked. They had no idea how to handle that kind of respect. But God says they bear His image. Even thieves and pushers and rapists? Yes. Partly what pushes men to crime is that no one ever treated them like they were somebody. When you do, amazing things can happen.

Well, how are you doing with the elderly? Proverbs 16:31 *A gray head is a crown of glory.* Leviticus 19:32 *You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God.* Of all people, these should be respected, but often they aren't. Marxist theory and evolutionary theory leads us to value people according to their usefulness. If you're old or unproductive - you're just a burden to us. God goes out of His way to say these are the ones to honor most. I once heard a talk by a social worker who dressed up as an old lady to study how people treated the elderly. She was shocked by the lack of respect she received as an old lady compared to a young lady. How do you do at this? With your parents or grandparents? With the slow driver in front of you? Do you value the life of the elderly? God does. And, by the way, I have been personally blessed and encouraged by so many of you who are in or have been through that season in which you are caring for elderly parents. I see you applying the principles of Scripture sometimes at great expense to yourself. Thank you. Your Lord sees and is honored by that.

On the other side of this issue are the very young. Often times we treat our children like pets without even thinking. Do you listen to your child? Play with your child? Do you let them know that they are precious treasures worthy of your time and your attention? Or do they pick up from you that they are a bother? When you come to church gatherings do you speak to the children or just their parents? Think about that – consider how you can treat children with dignity.

Finally, consider the pre-born. Oh that my eyes might be as fountains to weep over this tragedy! God is, as we have seen - pro-life. Why are some of us stirred up over abortion? Because we believe life is precious and valuable. No man, no woman, has a right to destroy that which bears God's image whether that's in your body or outside it. Jesus Christ said about tax money - that it belonged to Caesar because it bore Caesar's image. But that which bears God's image belongs to whom? To God. How dare we destroy the weak, the elderly, the young and especially the weakest member of our race - the pre-born baby. The call of God is to treat all men with dignity and respect.

Frankly, this is a great opportunity for the church of Christ. We Christians have a biblical basis for treating people with respect regardless of lifestyle. We don't need to approve a man's sin to treat him with dignity and love. We can show people that even though we believe their behavior

is sinful we will treat them better than they are treated by the world. I noticed that the youth group I led for years and especially our Inter-varsity fellowship group in college, attracted some real far-out kind of folks. Boy, could I tell you some stories. I'm talking heavy-duty strange people - not even Christians, but they came to our group. Why? What brought them? These folks were not like us and did not agree with us but they came because they found one group that treated them like they were somebody. Someone said - *where there's light there's bugs*. That's true and that's okay. Let there be light.

G.K. Chesterton, in his biography of St. Francis writes this:

To him a man stays always a man and does not disappear in a dense crowd any more than in a desert. He honored all men; that is, he not only loved but respected them all. What gave him extraordinary personal power was this: that from the pope to the beggar, from the sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernadone was really interested in him, in his inner life from the cradle to the grave; that he himself was being valued and taken seriously and not merely added to the spoil of some social policy or the names of some clerical document... he treated the whole mob as a mob of kings.

I confess that I am not very good at that. But I want to be better and I see why I should be. Now, what's all this mean for you? About what relationship is God speaking to your heart? Who must you come to view and then treat as an image-bearer of God? Yourself - some of you must begin there? Your kids? Your parents? Your colleagues? Your neighbors? Your teacher? You think on this. Years ago at a singles group I attended we sang a song that says, *I love you with the love of the Lord, Yes, I love you with the love of the Lord. And I see in you the glory of my King*. Do you see it? God says, tarnished as it is by sin, His image is still there in every person you meet. Man that is heavy news. But it's true. When you face the gang at work tomorrow say, as you face them, "I see in you the image of my King" and treat them, yourself, all men with dignity and respect, for God's sake, let's do it. And now, let's go to prayer, and as we do, you take a moment to consider how you will apply these things and pray for those whom God has brought to mind.