

The Jesus Paradigm

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Here is where the discussion of the identity and presence of the image of God in man leads to greater insights as to who we are as human beings. Everyone must determine for him or herself who they are as a human being. Too many people allow someone else to define them. The problem with this is that everyone works from his or her own presuppositions, and everyone has presuppositions concerning the issue of who we are as human beings. A presupposition is simply what one has accepted as true concerning a given matter. How we have come to these presuppositions is another matter. Few of us have adequately informed ourselves on the great majority of the things we consider to be true. This is simply the way we function or dysfunction, whichever the case may be.

If we believe the account of man's creation found in Genesis 1-3, then it follows that all human life is the result of the existence of the first man, Adam. The best case for the identity of the image of God has to do with the fact that within man's spirit exists an intrinsic sense of moral consciousness that is inexplicable without the existence of a cause adequate to have produced that effect. Like produces like, similarity in kind produces similarity in kind, it does not produce dissimilarity in kind, as a nonhuman being does not produce a human being, no matter how many millions of years is granted for the process.

The Inseparable Link

That which is unique to man and is not identifiable with any other earthly life form is his "spirit." Only man has that which is identified in the Scriptures as "spirit" (Hebrew *ruach*, Greek *pneuma*).

All other life forms created by God have only a biological existence represented by the word *bios*, which is the “life” of any living entity on earth, whether human or non-human. There is also the Greek word “*psuche*,” meaning conscious animation, often translated as “soul,” a word which itself has a very multicolored array of connotations in English. But essentially it is the conscious animation of a life form whether human or non-human.

Words are simply sounds (when spoken) or symbols (when written) that are intended to convey an idea or concept for communication purposes. What gives a word its meaning beyond its etymological root is the way it is used in the communication of thought within a given context. For our purposes in this study, it is significant that the word *pneuma* is used in both the Greek Septuagint of the OT and the Greek NT to identify the “Spirit of God” as well as the “human spirit.” If man is a dual being, flesh and spirit, and God is not flesh, he is spirit; then the image of God must be in some way identified with man’s spirit.

From all that has been presented in this study, it would be safe to say that the image of God and the spirit of man are closely related; or perhaps, even inseparably linked. Concerning the spirit as a point of interaction, H. E. Boers writes,

There was in the beginning **a point of contact** for man and God in that man was created in the image of God, who is the Divine Original, after which the human image was formed. For this reason God could see himself reflected in man and man could find in God the infinitely larger self that underlay his own being (H. E. Boer, *An Ember Still Glowing*, p 79).

Intrinsic in the spirit of man is an ontological sense that he is something more than an evolved humanoid, as some would have him believe. There is a sense of a higher morality within man than that presented by the social sciences of the academic world (cf. Romans 1:18-32).

With only few exceptions the greater majority of the human race acknowledges Jesus as one of the most perfect human beings

who has ever lived. Especially, as relates to his moral character and his unselfish attitude toward others. The secular university cannot compete in ideologies of moral development with the moral character of Jesus of Nazareth.

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When one realizes that believing the Genesis account of the creation of man implies that they are a being created in the image of God, such a realization can alter one's whole self-image and give them a sense of who they are that nothing else could ever do. If one believes something deeply enough they can be transformed by that belief. Such could lead to an awakening within every believer a sense of moral oughtness that derives from the very moral character of God. One of the most important of the beliefs of Christianity is that this moral character is exemplified in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who was a paradigm for what it means to live as a being created in the image of God. The word "paradigm" as used here means, "that which serves as a pattern or model."

Here we are saying that there is an intrinsic presence of the moral character of God within man that is a part of the presence of the image of God within them, and it can be awakened through faith. Without this sense of moral oughtness to lead him or her in moral/ethical decisions, man is on his own. From the time one comes to faith through conversion to Christ, believer has before him or her the example of Christ to exemplify what it means to be a man created in the image of God. Belief in Christ can awaken this presence of moral consciousness and begin to awaken the image of God within them. The faith of the believer is informed by the teachings and the example of Jesus himself, who was not only created in the image of God, he was the very image of God.

On the last evening Jesus spent with his disciples one of them ask him about God,

*Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it will suffice us."
Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and you don't know me, Philip? In that you have seen me, you have seen the Father; how*

can you say, Show us the Father?"(John 14:8-9)

What had Jesus shown the twelve by which they could see God imaged in him?

As stated earlier, a paradigm is that which serves as a pattern or model. In the culture of modernity, especially, in the Western world, man has developed education to an art form; but, no better method can be found to teach a person how to emulate another in his or her life than to set before them a pattern or model of that person. This is what the NT Gospels do, in addition to other things. Aside from the ongoing debate as to whether the Gospels are historical biographies, collections of early Christian teaching or preaching, oral traditions or edited collections of the story tradition extant within the first century church; no matter you read them, Jesus of Nazareth walks before us in the Gospels. What could the twelve have seen in Jesus that imaged God to others? How could they say, "in that we have seen him, we have seen the Father?"

Discerning the Image *Imitatio Christi*

The argument has been made that Jesus was not only a model of what it means to be a being created in the image of God, he was, as Paul informs us, the very image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). If it is so that every man has within him the presence of the image of God, why is the image no more discernable? This same question can be asked with reference to the spirit of man. It is a cause which is evidenced by its effects, to be somewhat technical, but what we are talking about is something of a hidden treasure that can be found with the whole of mankind, but it must be "found" in that it was suppressed at the time of the expulsion of man from the garden and only manifests itself in extraordinary men and women. As C. S. Lewis wrestled with this question, he determined to present this reality as some that came as a surprise to the person who came to realize that it was there. It was something of the nature of God that the greater portion of mankind has made dormant by the elimination of God in their lives. Paul describes this in Romans 1:18-32.

This raises the question of how we can know if the image of God has been awakened within a person? The best example of this would be the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Would we have been able to discern the image of God in this carpenter from Nazareth of Galilee? How would we know that we were in the presence of such a person? If we were looking for such a person, what characteristics would we look for?

To begin with, would we not look for someone who was godly or even a "godlike" person in terms of demeanor and conduct? So also, would we not look for a person who exuded wisdom and understanding in the affairs of life; especially, in matters relating to people; a person having great insight as to how a person should be treated or who a person should treat another person. Would we not look for a person who was unsurpassed in his knowledge of God? His knowledge of God's revealed word, and how to correctly interpret and teach it to others would surely be a distinguishable attribute. His knowledge of how to live his life by the word of God should be superior to those among whom he walked, and his life would exemplify that knowledge. Would it not be evident that he truly knew who God had revealed himself to be and thus knew who he, as a being created in the image of God, was supposed to be?

Would not beneficence or benevolence toward others be an essential characteristic of his nature? He would show compassion to those in need, mercy to those who desired it, grace to those not deserving it, and good will or *agape* toward everyone, even those adverse to him or those who had made themselves his enemies. His capacity and will to forgive those who were his enemies would surely distinguish him. Because of his moral goodness he would be highly esteemed and greatly respected, drawing others to him by his extraordinary persona.

His benevolence would not be the only characteristic that distinguished him. His opposition to evil and to suffering caused by those who would do harm to others would be an essential part of his character. His courage to withstand such persons or forces would

have caused him to have great admiration in the eyes of those among whom he walked. We could also consider that such a person would do all within his power and authority to help those in need and befriend those who needed his friendship and fellowship.

His use of his emotions would always be appropriate to the situation and their intent as given in creation. Whether in happiness or sadness, fear or anger, in love and hate, or in matters of desire, his experience of his emotions would be true to their purpose as intended by God. In life in the flesh would be disciplined and unpretentious. As concerns matters of the flesh, he would consider food and drink as blessing from God, never indulging in excess in matters of the flesh. In the exercise of his will, he would be in complete control of his will, realizing the responsibility that freedom of will gave him. He would be decisive and assertive in his decisions or choices. He would move with certitude of mind and a sense of purpose in all he did. Yet, he would not be self-willed in his relationships with man or God. He would be especially decisive in all matters moral or ethical, having no hesitation in confronting sin whenever and wherever he found it.

One would think that his longing for oneness with God would be his greatest passion. In his listening for the voice of God in his many hours in the Scriptures and his communication with God in his extraordinary life of prayer would be an example for all who desired to one with God. The designation "holy one" would clearly be appropriate to him by all who knew him, as manifested in his righteousness, justice or fairness, and in intolerance of evil.

Of course in all this, one can see Jesus standing there in every characteristic we would expect to discern in one who exemplified what it meant to be a being created in the image of God. Jesus was the very manifestation of the image of God; he had born the image of God in his humanity, but as the Son of God, he was the very image of God. In all he said and all that he did he was showing them the Father. In every miracle he performed there was something of the moral goodness of God within it. In all of his teaching, his stories and debates there was something of the identity of God, his

compassion, his lovingkindness, and his mercy. In his association with the people called the *anawim* (the oppressed) in table fellowship, his acts of random kindness, and forgiveness of sins, Jesus showed his disciples the Father in that in that in him they could see the image of God.

Awakening the Image

As we have seen, many of the references to *pneuma* in the writings of Paul are concerned with **the human spirit**, which was given to Adam at creation and has been passed down through the human race from generation to generation through human procreation. The result of Adam's disbelief of God's words in the temptation of Adam/Eve was the loss of the *imago dei* in the human spirit (*pneuma tou anthropou*), but that can be reversed through the power of faith, and this was a great part of Jesus' message. Belief is that powerful, it can transform a person; in fact, it is more powerful than disbelief and can reverse the effects of disbelief. This is the heart of hearts of Paul's theology concerning human redemption.

The gift of moral empowerment is given the Christian as a gift of the presence of God and works to empower the image of God in the believer and is the presence of the moral reflection of God in us. The gift of the Holy Spirit is an empowering moral presence that may be drawn upon at will by the Christian in times of temptation or weakness of the human spirit in the internal conflict between the flesh and the spirit. The Holy Spirit does not usurp the will of the believer; rather, it empowers the spirit of the believer, but it must be called upon by an act of will by the believer.

What evidence is there that the image of God is an actual reality? We have within us an empowering presence to strengthen us in the demands on our moral character. Do any of us draw upon that power, or do we let it lie dormant while we draw upon our culture for our moral decisions? Everybody says, or everybody is doing! And what is your culture telling you? Look at the message of our culture!

It is in God's moral attributes that man can most easily be identified with God. The moral attributes of God can only be seen in man when he realizes who he was created to be – a masterpiece of God's creative activity, whose uniqueness is that one shows himself to be a son or daughter of God by the way he behaves as moral beings. The moral character of God is intrinsic within the spirit of a being; breathed into Adam at creation, he then passes it on to his offspring through the life force within him; and so to the whole human race. The image of God characterized by the moral character of God is present in every human being, either dormant or smoldering, or active.

The Gift

There has been a long running debate over the correct understanding of the expression "gift of the Holy Spirit" as used in Acts 2:38 (*ten dorean tou hagiou pneumatos*). Its grammatical construction could be taken as genitive case (the gift of the Holy Spirit) or ablative (the gift from the Holy Spirit). The issue concerns the expectation of the believers. Are believers to expect God to come into them as a supernatural force and take control of their personalities and do for them what they cannot do for themselves? Or, is the expression to be understood as a promise of gift to be with the believer in his or her daily life to aid them in times of crisis or in matters of moral conflict within their lives?

The one interpretation lends itself to a shift in responsibility from the believer to God in the moral decisions of life. The other interpretation sees the gift or promise as one of assisting the believer with empowerment of their spirit, especially their moral character when the believer calls upon the Lord as did David throughout the Psalms and as did the early church during times of crisis and moral conflict. If the believer is fitting him or herself for eternity, as silver in the fire when being refined by the silversmith, then would it not be our own responsibility in decision-making that is under consideration? This may seem like a minor distinction but what is at issue is accepting our own responsibility in these matters. Rather than a "let go and let God" mind-set, would it not be more

consistent with the message of the NT to have an “O God, give me the moral empowerment to do the right thing” mentality (Eph 3:6; Phil 4:4-7, 13; Col 1:9-11; 2 Tim 4:17; Heb 4:14-16).

The activity of God in the life of the believer is not necessarily associated with the display of gifts of supernatural power as discussed by Paul in 1 Cor 12-14. There is too much instruction in the NT concerning our responsibility to develop and follow our spirit newly regenerated in Christ in matters of faith and moral behavior for us to assume a mentality of God will do it for me. In extraordinary situations he has given such gifts as with prophets of old and the apostles and prophets of the first century church, but the gift of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer is more of a gift the Spirit will give when requested, and that is contingent on our faith, which is where the whole discussion really centers for the believer.

Taken on the whole, it would appear that the interpretation of the expression “the gift of the Spirit” is the source of the empowerment of the believer’s spirit, which is a promise of something beyond the charismatic gifts of the earliest believers, which led to tension within the church at Corinth. What the believer needs in his or her walk through the earth is often the spiritual presence of God in time of need than the ability to perform miracles. Perhaps, the gift promised the believers at large is more of a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:24-29, which is more of a promise to all believers than the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, that Peter quotes in his sermon in Acts 2, a prophecy which appears from its effects to have been more exclusive. The promise of Acts 2:38, “and you shall received the gift of/from the Holy Spirit,” is most naturally understood as universally applicable as the promise, “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,” is to be understood, an interpretation that is reinforced by verse 39, “this promise is for you, for your children, and as many as are afar off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

The empowering presence of God in matters of faith and moral decision is there for the empowering of the believer’s spirit, but it

does not usurp the autonomy of the human spirit; rather, it is there to reinforce the believer's spirit and give new life the image of God in the life of the believer. This is as James says in 1:13-14, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed."

This moral empowerment given the believer as a gift has always been a part of man's being. It is intrinsic within the image of God, which is a part of the spirit given man at creation, when God breathed into the face of man and he became a living being. The presence of the *imago dei* is a part of the life force transferred by procreation to the offspring of all human beings. As already mentioned, this gift of God has never usurped the freedom of man to choose his course of life in his earthly sojourn, but it can reinforce or empower man in his walk through the earth.

Conclusion

The beginning of the process of the restoration of the image of God in man is conversion to Christ, the continuation of one's pilgrimage through this life, the vale of soul-making, follows with the daily tension that exists between the spirit and the flesh. The believer increases in knowledge of the will of God through the renewal of mind and the adoption of the mind of Christ. The love of God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength and the love of those other than ourselves is a natural outgrowth in the moral character of the believer. Jesus of Nazareth serves as a paradigm of the image of God for the believer. From him we learn of what it means to be created in the image of God in terms of identity and behavior. Of course all is rooted in one's beliefs of what is revealed in Scripture concerning who we are, what we are, why we are here, and what lies beyond this life we are living out in this vale of soul-making we know as earthly existence of Jesus who is newly created in Christ.

Embracing Christianity means far more than calling oneself a Christian and going to church on something of a regular basis. Being a genuine follower of Jesus means all the above. The reason we are

here on this planet centers in this one fact, *viz.* we are beings created in the image of God and we are here to rekindle that smoldering image and bring it back to its original glow or glory, not only in life after death, but here and now. New creation has already begun for the spirit of the believer, and new existence will become a fulfilled reality for both the spirit and the body in the coming of Christ at the end of the age.

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