

Deformation of Image - Inalienable Aspects - Moral Agency

by John Murray

The sermon explores the complexities of the divine image in humanity, emphasizing the inalienable aspects of personality and moral agency despite the fall.

Duration: 46:23

Scripture: Genesis 1:26, Genesis 5:1, Genesis 5:3, Genesis 7:3-9, Genesis 9:6, Ephesians 4:4, Colossians 3:10

Topics: "Moral Agency"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by praying for discernment and guidance from the Holy Spirit and the Holy Word. They express a concern about losing contact with the committee and proceed to briefly recap the main points made in the previous sermon. The first point is that, based on biblical evidence, fallen man is still considered to be in the image of God. However, other passages define the divine image in terms of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, which cannot be attributed to fallen man. The speaker then focuses on three characteristics of personality: self-consciousness, rationality, and freedom.

Transcript

Well, in the past time, gentlemen, thank you for your patience. O Lord, O God, we pray Thee that we may ever be imbued with that discernment which Thy Holy Spirit imparts and which is directed by Thy Holy Word so that we shall bring every thought into captivity to the revelation Thou hast given us and therefore into captivity to Him who has given all authority in heaven and in earth who is our Lord as also our Saviour. And may we have the joy of His service and in that service find perfect freedom.

In His name, Amen. Well, I'm going to repeat some parts of what I said yesterday because I have the impression that I lost contact with the class yesterday. You may not have that impression, but I have that impression.

I'm going to repeat very briefly the main point, so you don't need to take notes. It's the basis of the biblical evidence, particularly Genesis 5, 3, Genesis 9, 6, verse 3, 9. It is meant that the underlying assumption of these passages is that man in his fallen state is in the image of God. And that, I take it, is an all-important reason derived from the Scripture itself.

And if that is the correct position, as I submitted, it is an all-important consideration in reference to the whole debate which has been conducted in the Church and particularly within the Protestant Church, so that man in his fallen natural state can be spoken of as in the image of God. There are, however, these other passages, Ephesians 4, 24 and Colossians 3, 10, which define the divine image in terms of knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth. Now, these qualities cannot be predicated of man in his fallen state, knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth.

And, therefore, man cannot be said to be in the divine image in respect of knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth in his fallen state. That, of course, I think, is decided, that he cannot be spoken of in these terms as in the divine image in his fallen state. The only question that arises in connection with that definition is whether knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth are included in the divine image in which man was originally created.

That's the only question in reference to these two passages. Now, there are those who maintain, and maintain very emphatically, that the definitions given in Ephesians 4, 24 and Colossians 3, 10 do not refer to man as he was originally created, but only to the new creation in Christ Jesus, and therefore contend that these passages don't have any relevance to the original creation. They do not bear upon the interpretation of Genesis 1, 26 or Genesis 5, 1. My thesis is, as it has been the thesis of the classic reformed theologians throughout history, that although these two passages in the Pauline Epistle certainly refer to the new creation, and therefore to the image in which man is recreated by redemption and regeneration, nevertheless there must be in these passages some reminiscence or some allusion to the original image in which man was created, or the image in which man was originally created.

It is a datum to be established from scripture that man was created in knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth because he was created upright, he was created very good, and therefore he was created in knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth, and these passages define the divine image in terms of knowledge of truth. Is it not a necessary inference that man was originally created in the divine image? It is not. Now I am not as dogmatic on this particular thesis as it concerns Ephesians 4, 24, Col.

3. I am not as dogmatic on that as I am on the first point, that man with fallen state is in the image of God. I think that's an all-important datum and affects not only the doctrine of sin but also the doctrine of salvation. It affects not only anthropology but soteriology as we are concerned with this question.

Nevertheless, I do think that the balance of inference, the balance of consideration would favor the view that the image in which man was created at the beginning includes knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth. And if that is the case, then there is an aspect to the divine image in which man was created which he has forfeited by the fall. Forfeited by the fall, and so it would be necessary to distinguish between the two aspects of the divine image in which man was originally created.

First of all, that aspect that is unalienable, that belongs to the very being of man. Second, that aspect is forfeited in the knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth. I would say that not as much is bound up with that second aspect of the divine image.

I would say not as much significance is bound up with that aspect, with that thesis, as is bound up with the other theses, that there is an aspect to the divine image that is unalienable and that belongs to man in the fallen state. And I think that the reason for my saying that will appear as we proceed. So we now proceed where I left off yesterday, to discover what is meant by the image in which man was created and which

belongs to him in his fallen state.

What is that inalienable, unlosable aspect of the divine image, or more accurately, of man in the image of God? Well, my thesis, that it consists in personality. Personality. I'll call it just for convenience purposes, but that's not an adequate description or an adequate definition.

I'm using it for convenience purposes as I can. The main point here is that man is in the image of God because he is in Him, and that therefore consists, that is God's image, in that in virtue of which man has preeminence over the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea. That in virtue of which man has preeminence over the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea.

Why am I using these terms, beasts of the field, fowl of the air, fish of the sea? Because it is just these terms that appear at the very beginning in connection with Genesis 1.26. All these other animate beings were created to their kind. To their kind. The mean man or the mean old man.

To their kind. Then there is thrust upon you Genesis 1.26 that does make man in our image, image, or into our likeness. And I take it that we have an index in that sequence of Genesis 24, 25 and 26.

I say we have an index in that sequence to that in which the divine image consists. Namely, that distinctly that belongs to man over against all the other creatures mentioned, even the animate beings mentioned in the preceding two. I don't think anything is more natural or more reasonable than that.

It isn't that Genesis 1.26 defines the divine image in that which distinguishes man from the other animate beings. Not at all. It isn't that Genesis 1.26 defines the divine image in that distinct or reasonable and natural interest to be drawn from this sequence that we have pointed to some definition of the divine image by taking account of the differentiation between man and these others.

Well then, when we take account of personality, may we call it, you take account of that by which man is differentiated. Namely, in respect of his personality, what is it that constitutes personality? That's the next point, surely. What is it that constitutes personality? I think we'll just have to say that personality means that he is a self-conscious, rational, free, moral, religious agent.

Self-conscious, rational, free, moral, religious agent. Now, I'll just focus attention upon three of these characterizations. The first is freedom of desire, freedom.

It's a free agent. What do we mean by freedom? Well, freedom means the power of rational self-determination. The power of rational self-determination.

That man is endowed with volition, volition, which means that he is not forced nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil. He is not forced nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil. That latter part is a verbal quotation from the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Well, to explicate that statement, what we should have to say, man's acts are the result of a volition, volition is the result of decision, and decision is constrained by the dispositional complex which in biblical terminology means the heart, or is to be equated with the heart. Some of these expressions may be somewhat unintelligible to you at this stage, but when we come to deal with free agency, I think these expressions will become intelligible if they are not already intelligible to you. And I will pass on to the next.

Morality. Man is not only a free agent, he is a moral agent. And that means that he has responsibility, rational responsibility, that the law of God applies to man, and that he, in the exercise of rational free agency, is obligated to fulfill that law.

Man is never non-moral. Never non-moral. He calls for Him in every moment.

There is the distinction between right and wrong, and conscience, by which he accuses or excuses himself. It's ineradicable. This character, this character, is directly upon his likeness to God.

Directly upon his likeness to God. For his moral responsibility is based upon what God is. This does not mean that God is responsible to anyone, or to anything, higher than Himself.

But it does mean that since God is justice, and God is love, and God is truth, imagine all these things, since God is justice, love, and truth, the ultimate criterion of obligation for man is likeness to God. The ultimate criterion is likeness. If we think of the law, which in the concrete governs man's thought and conduct, the law of God is simply God's perfection coming to expression for the regulation of man's thought and behavior.

The law of God, therefore, reflects what God is. And conformity to that law brings man into likeness with God. So the basis, I hope, the basis of his moral obligation is that he is like God, that he is like God.

And the demand of this obligation is that he be like God. It is his likeness to God that grounds obligation, and it is to conformity to the image or likeness of God that the whole element of obligation leads up there. So you see, intimately bound up with likeness.

Intimately, I say, bound up with likeness, his moral agency rests upon the fact his moral obligation stems from the fact that he must be like God, cultivate likeness to God. Now the third feature of the definition of personality I gave you, on which I'm going to focus attention, is religion, the deed of morality, religion. Now, religion points to the most intimate relation to religion, the deed of morality, religion.

Now, religion points to the most intimate relation that man sustains to God. Morality and a very direct relationship to God, but the most intimate relation is denoted by religion, because religion has its own instance. And since man was created for that glorious end, he is indestructible, and that is witnessed, too, by what has been called the sense of divinity, or the sense of deity, the sense of deity.

You know these Latin terms, the sense of divinity, such as was ever constrained, take the favor of what he conceives to be the Lord of Life. Take the favor of what he conceives to be the Lord of Life and Destiny, however perverted maybe he is of that Lordship. Now, it is the content of those who deny that man in his fallen state is in the image of God, and particularly a short of equality.

My thesis is the opposite of that, and it is to this effect that it is only because man will take the divine image that he can be irresponsibly guilty and be braved. It is this divine image that constitutes his personality, and only as personality can he be condemned and suffer the consequences of his sins. It would be the condition even of perdition, final perdition, because only a person can be finally lost and suffer the pains of death.

The essence of final perdition is the unrestrained execution of the wrath of God. But the unrestrained execution of the wrath of God is opposed to personal relationship. In a way, I think that it is the divine image that constitutes the aesthetic identity of man, and it is only because man has this specific

characteristic by virtue of the divine image that sin and depravity can be predicated on him, can be finally to the ultimate penalty.

Sin and depravity deserve so that so far from prejudicing, prejudicing anthropology, and so kamatheology, and esoteriology, so far from prejudicing any aspect of the biblical doctrine, as they pertain to man in his fallen state, his very doctrines are bound up with the theme that constitutes the specific character of man. So by his definition of the image of God, and it is just because his definition consists in images, but his definition consists in the image of sin or sin. Now another consideration.

When we think that there is an aspect to the divine image which is inalienable and indispensable to man, we must not think it is inalienable, it is unaffected by the fall. It is one thing to think of that which is inalienable as being exercised in all conditions, another thing altogether is that to be abnormal to sin has brought a moral agency by means of never in the proper exercise of the agency, the specific agency that belongs to him, and that person is the whole soul's love of and service to God. The whole soul's love of God and the service of God.

In a way that we might describe personality, personality as being endowed with understanding, feeling, and way. Perspective, which we may view personally, that man is spirit, and that is inconceivable apart from the exercise of understanding, feeling, and way. That spirit is inconceivable apart from the exercises of understanding, feeling, and will.

Spirit, of course, has been, but it is never simply a subject to be conceived of as such. There is activity belonging to the very conception of the human spirit. And so as long as man is spirit, he has intellect, feeling, and will.

But always remember that his understanding, his intellect, his darkened perceptions and illusions are perverted. His will is enslaved, his conscience is distorted, so that man's moral agency, so inalienable, is nevertheless so disdiserted and perverted from the proper end of purpose that his personality, his very personality, he would otherwise be praised, become never isolated, never isolated from the metaphysical, from the moral relations in which that metaphysical stands. Because man, he can never isolate the metaphysical from the moral relations in which that metaphysical stands and the moral obligations to God which are entailed in the relations of man's metaphysical being.

Moral relations are entailed in his metaphysical being as personality. Now, before I depart from this particular topic, one other question. That is, what of the body? It would be very easy to say, wouldn't it, that man is an image of God, man is made in the image of God, and therefore man is, and thus, scrutinized.

The body of man, another consideration would be that if God does not have a body, then the image of God must be scrutinized. The spirit of man, that is the pattern of thought that has been followed by a good man, and that only we speak of him in the image of God. Personally, I don't believe that Jesus is cannibal.

However plausible it may seem to me, the reason, which I have just mentioned,

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