

**§ 10. Doctrine of Man**  
**Lecture 5**  
**Man as a Personal Being**

Last time we talked about man's being in the image of God and what this means. I suggested that those who see some sort of a fundamental dichotomy between an ontological or substantial image of God and a functional image of God are guilty of making a false dichotomy. In fact, the reason that man can function in the image of God is precisely because of certain properties that he has ontologically. So it is the ontology that grounds, or is the basis for, the function.

Let's talk a bit more about man as a personal being. We saw that God is the personal, infinite God; that is to say, on the one hand God is personal (actually tri-personal), but on the other hand God is infinite, necessary, eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, perfectly good, and so forth. Insofar as God is infinite, a great chasm separates God from the rest of creation. Man stands on the side of the chasm that belongs to creatures. Man is himself a finite, created thing, and in that respect is like animals, plants, and inorganic substances. He has a hominid body akin to that of the great apes. But insofar as God is personal, man is like God and unlike the rest of the created order. To say that man is in the image of God ontologically, I think, is to say that man is personal. He is a person in the same way that God is personal, and he has the essential attributes of personhood (though, of course, since he's not infinite he has these attributes to a finite degree), and therefore he can function in certain ways – he can be related to God as God's co-regent on this planet in stewarding the Earth and its resources.

What then are the attributes sufficient for personhood? Reflection on ourselves as persons suggests that such properties as self-consciousness, rationality, and freedom of the will are sufficient for personhood. While higher primates like chimpanzees, for example, may have a rudimentary consciousness of themselves (they seem to be able to recognize themselves in a mirror, for example, although even this is disputed), nevertheless they do not have what philosophers call a transcendental ego, that is to say the ability to reflect upon one's own mental states, to be aware of oneself as a self, to say “I think that” before anything they believe. Similarly, even though chimps exhibit considerable intelligence, they cannot think abstractly as is evident from their inability to learn a language despite endless hours of instruction by primatologists. Even if they have souls they do not have rational souls. Finally, as a consequence, they lack freedom of the will but rather are causally determined to do what they do. On a Christian view of man, however, we have self-consciousness, rationality, and free will, and therefore are persons in the fullest sense of that word. We are as a result responsible moral agents able to relate to God. What an exalted view of man this is compared to the naturalistic view promulgated by people like La Mettrie and Dawkins!

## START DISCUSSION

*Student:* Could you just clarify something you said about the primates – they have a soul, just not a rational soul? The way I've always understood it when I studied that is that's what a soul is – to have rationality.

*Dr. Craig:* That's not the traditional view. For someone like Aristotle and the tradition that followed him, the medieval theologians, they thought that sentient beings like horses and dogs and cats have souls but they're not endowed with rationality. They are poorer souls – less richly endowed souls than our human souls which are uniquely rational. I'm not taking a position on this. Philosophy of mind is not my area of expertise. But there are contemporary thinkers who would say the same. For example, I heard the great Nobel prize-winning neurologist Sir John Eccles (who is a dualist-interactionist) once say that although he doubted that frogs have souls he thinks that the higher animals do have minds or souls even if they don't have rationality. Similarly, my colleague J. P. Moreland, who does specialize in philosophy of mind, would say that animals have souls though they don't have rational souls. So that's why I said even if you want to say that chimps do have souls, they don't have rational souls as is evident from their inability to think symbolically or abstractly because they cannot learn a language.

*Student:* I was thinking this discussion kind of reminds me of the philosopher Boethius and his definition. I think he says a person is an individual substance with a rational nature. Is that similar to what you're talking about?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, that would be the sort of classical Aristotelian concept of a soul or a person. Does Boethius actually use the word “person?”

*Student:* I'd have to double-check but I believe so. I don't remember the exact words but I know when other people talk about his view that's how they usually summarize it.

*Dr. Craig:* OK. Good. That's in line with what I'm suggesting. This is traditional.

*Student:* When it comes to the issue of abortion obviously because people try to say “but a fetus isn't rational or anything” but once you understand how these categories work you'd say “even though a fetus isn't currently functioning rationally, it's still a rational substance by nature even if it can't yet actually think at that moment.”

*Dr. Craig:* Very good. Thank you. That's a wonderful clarification. I think you're absolutely right. One of my pro-life friends put it this way: The fetus is not a potential person; the fetus is a person with potential.

*Student:* [off mic, suggesting Frank Beckwith was the one who said that]

*Dr. Craig:* Is that who said that? Frank Beckwith? I don't recall. He's a Christian philosopher at Baylor University. I think that captures it quite rightly.

*Student:* Is there a difference between, say, the secular view of the soul versus the biblical view which to me entails more of an afterlife.

*Dr. Craig:* That's unclear. The question you're raising is the immortality of the soul. Is the soul naturally immortal? Does it naturally survive the death of the body? Now, certainly that's what Plato thought. The Greek tradition was that because the soul is immaterial it isn't affected, in fact, it's liberated when the body dies. The body is like a prison house of the soul that drags it down by its passions and physicality. The soul is set free by the death of the body. But it's not entirely clear that that is the biblical view. A good many people would think that immortality is something that has to be bestowed by God even on the soul much less on the body. That it doesn't have a natural propensity to survive the death of the body, but it can survive the death of the body by the gift of God – that God sustains it in being. I don't have a position on that because I've not studied it. I certainly do believe that the soul does survive the body. In fact, I'm going to say something about that in a few minutes, God willing. But whether it does that by a natural propensity or a supernatural gift of God, I don't have a dog in that fight.

*Student:* You mentioned something about that primates or chimps can't be able to use language in order to talk.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes.

*Student:* I remember going back to college and hearing from an anthropologist and seeing a video of a bonobo trying to communicate through sign language. Have you heard of this?

*Dr. Craig:* Oh, yes. In my study of the historical Adam I have been reading a lot about human origins and the differences between animals and man so as to try to discern where in history human consciousness first emerged. One of the striking things that has come out of these experiments trying to teach chimps language – whether a spoken language or sign language because, after all, they may not have the vocal cords for enunciating words but you could teach them sign language which is a language just as much as oral language is – is they can't master it because they can't learn syntax. They cannot learn how to put signs and words together so as to form coherent sentences. So it's generally agreed now among these primatologists that even if chimps can learn, for example, if they press this yellow button they'll get a banana, or if they press this orange button they'll get an orange, they cannot discourse in language about bananas and oranges.

*Student:* Tacking on to the last thing you mentioned, there were some studies done with humans that if the developing person gets exposed to a certain language they have a propensity to learn it even if they get raised in a place where it's a different language. So there's something happening that's supernatural.

*Dr. Craig:* Or a God-given endowment. We don't need to say it's a miracle, I think.

*Student:* It's that proclivity; that capacity. The second point, the connection with the soul is I think you have to be careful of identifying the soul only with rationality or the brain. If you get brain damage, you don't lose your soul. The mind informs the soul but gives expression to the heart.

*Dr. Craig:* But I haven't identified the soul with the brain. Certainly I would agree with you that someone can suffer terrible brain damage so that they're no longer able to think rationally or maybe they suffer a terrible personality change and so forth, but that's not to say that they are no longer a rational substance, a rational soul. They've just been incapacitated because the apparatus they use to think has now been seriously damaged. I mentioned Sir John Eccles a moment ago. In this same talk that Eccles gave that I heard he compared the brain to a piano. He said just as the pianist uses the piano to play music, the soul or the mind uses the brain as an instrument for thought. And if the instrument is damaged you will not be able to produce beautiful music. It will be discordant. Similarly, if the brain is damaged, there will not be coherent thought because the instrument that the soul uses for thought is impaired. So you're quite right in drawing our attention to the distinction between the brain (which is this glob of fat in your skull) and your soul (which survives the death of your body). There was one other point that you made right at the beginning that I wanted to comment on. What was your first remark? Do you remember? Oh, yes, learning language. This is another intriguing thing. I mentioned that despite thousands of hours by these primatologists to teach chimps language of some sort, they can't learn it. And yet you can take the most primitive savage, the most uncivilized aboriginal, put him in a cultured situation and, as you said, he'll learn the language. He'll even learn Polish, as difficult grammatically as that might be. In fact, my colleague Josh Swamidass has pointed out to me the remarkable fact that you can take primitive man and put him in a modern environment and modern culture and he'll get along just fine. He'll learn how to learn the language. He'll learn how to adapt. A great example of that would be the Indian, Squanto, who met the pilgrims when they came to Massachusetts. Squanto was, in effect, a Stone Age person. The Indians never got beyond Stone Age tools. They didn't even have a wheel. And yet Squanto was able to learn the language. He was able to go to England and work as a servant and butler, and then eventually finally did go back to his native people. But despite his primitive origins, he had these innate capacities that we talked about for language and for culture. It's quite extraordinary when you think about it, and very, very different than animals.

*Student:* Would you agree that one implication of the image of God doctrine is that creatures that bear that image are more valuable than objects that do not have the image of God?

*Dr. Craig:* Absolutely.

*Student:* A Spanish philosopher named Miguel de Unamuno (you may know the name) a hundred years ago said a human soul is worth all the universe. So one person is worth more than the entire non-human universe.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes. I had not heard that Unamuno said that, but Frederick Copleston, the famous historian of philosophy, said exactly the same thing. And it really struck me when he said it: one human being is worth more than the entire material universe taken together. That's extraordinary. And the source of that moral value – that intrinsic value – of human beings is the image of God.

*Student:* Where are you getting the attributes of personhood from? Are they coming from Scripture or is it from observing how humans are different from the rest of creation?

*Dr. Craig:* This is a good question. It's the latter, not the former. I'm not turning to Scripture to try to see attributes of personhood. The Scripture isn't a philosophy book. One of the striking things about Genesis 1:26-27 that is generally agreed upon by commentators is that the image of God is never defined in the text. It just says we're created in God's image and according to his likeness and no attempt by the author is made at all to explain what this means. So if we want to understand what it means, it seems to me we have to turn to philosophical theology. What I said was reflection on ourselves as persons reveals that properties like self-consciousness, rationality, and freedom of the will are sufficient for personhood. You and I are persons. We know that. We can begin what that as a given – that I am a person. And then I can ask myself in virtue of what am I a person? And it would seem to me that these properties would be among those that are what make us persons and are sufficient for personhood. And this is then consistent with Scripture, though I wouldn't pretend that this is the result of proof-texting.

*Student:* Not a question; just a verse that comes to mind. This is Ecclesiastes 3:11 which says, *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has put eternity in man's heart. Yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*” I think about that. It's a pretty big difference between us and animals. God put eternity in our heart, and even though animals are alive I don't think they have any comprehension of eternity.

*Dr. Craig:* No, and it's hard to know exactly what is all comprised in that phrase that “He's put eternity in man's heart.” What does that involve? I'm not sure, but clearly you're right – it's meant to set us apart from the rest of the animal creation.

*Student:* Two Scriptures. It says, *an honorable man without knowledge of the Holy One (Christ) is as the beasts of the field*, and then the other one is, while we're defining personhood, we don't . . . by ourselves . . . introspection and what we know of persons.

The Bible says, *Now we see through a glass darkly. But then we'll see clearly, and we'll know ourselves as we're known.* So we can't really see our image so we really don't know.

*Dr. Craig:* Well, you've got to read the verse in context. I think Paul is not addressing the question of what it is to be a person when he says we see through a glass darkly or in a dim mirror. I think that this method of analysis is quite legitimate. It's called phenomenology. You reflect on the phenomena of what it is to be a person, and I think that's perfectly legitimate. Of course, it's open to debate, but it seems to me that that's something that's acceptable.

*Student:* I agree it is good. I was just saying you can't go too far into conclusions. You can't do a second deduction from . . .

*Dr. Craig:* I'm not claiming some sort of certainty for these conclusions.

### **END DISCUSSION**

Let's go on to talk a bit about man as sinner. In relationship to God, of course, man is separated from God in virtue of his sin. But that's not destructive of man's being in the image of God. Man is still a personal being, still in the image of God, even though his relationship with God is ruptured because of the fall into sin. In his state of original righteousness, or perhaps better put, in his original state of innocence, there is an open and free-flowing relationship between God and man that is unobstructed by sin. But then in man's fallen state as a sinner the relationship between God and man is severed. There's an obstacle now, namely man's guilt and evil that prevents him from being related to God in the way that he was created to be. He now finds himself alienated from God and estranged from God in this fallen condition.

But then finally, in the state of grace, man finds his relationship with God restored through Jesus Christ. Now in the state of grace, man is able to experience the relationship with God that he was created to have, albeit a relationship of a flawed and fallen creature but nonetheless still forgiven and redeemed and regenerated in Christ. When the New Testament speaks of being conformed to the image of Christ, this is a different category from the image of God. This has to do with our sanctification. Insofar as we are in Christ and are being sanctified by his indwelling Holy Spirit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and so forth) then we become like Christ and so we come to bear his character ourselves.

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I've been wondering as you were talking. I have a three-and-a-half year old son. I've wondered when is the first sin as an individual? So, for example, the idea of sin being missing the mark, falling short – is missing the mark the difference between intentionally missing the mark and unintentionally missing the mark? If children are to die, for

example, when do they have the capacity so to speak to say, *I'm actually a sinner and I'm condemned or in need of grace*. Does that question makes sense?

*Dr. Craig:* Oh, that's a great question! It's obvious that little children often miss the mark. We don't talk about the terrible-twos for nothing! You know how badly little two-year-olds can miss the mark. But the question you're raising is: are they culpable for missing the mark in that way and therefore judged by God for these sins, if you call them sins? I'm inclined to say, based upon Jesus' attitude toward little children, that they are not culpable when they miss the mark as youngsters who haven't yet arrived at a mature consciousness of a moral agent. When you look at the way Jesus regarded children, the disciples tried to brush them off and dismiss them and Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me for such is the kingdom of God." He said if you do not receive the kingdom of heaven like one of these little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven, and then he talked about how their angels constantly stand before God regarding his face. Jesus had a very positive attitude toward these little children and thought of them as exemplifying the sort of faith and trust that is necessary in order to be a member of God's eternal kingdom. So I think that these little children, when they do wrong, are not held culpable for this wrongdoing. That will not come until they arrive at what's often called "the age of accountability." That's a popular phrase; it's not a scriptural one but I think the concept is scriptural. They will reach a point of moral maturity where now they will be held responsible by God for the wrongs that they do.

*Student:* Would you say that that age of accountability is different for every individual?

*Dr. Craig:* Surely it is. When you think of the differences among children, at the rate at which they mature, surely you can't say it's when they reach age six or age seven. It will be different with different children according to the rate at which they mature.

*Student:* This question leads me to wonder about the presentation of the Gospel with kids. If they aren't a sinner or accountable yet, what do you think about that in terms of if you were to say this person has become a sinner now, for example, and if this is their age of accountability, and now the appropriateness of the presentation of the Gospel to an individual.

*Dr. Craig:* That's a great question. I would say Christ died for their sins. He died on the cross to cover the sins of all mankind including those who would come after him including these little children should they grow up and begin to commit sins for which they're culpable. So he is their savior, at least potentially if they will place their trust in him. So I think if the child has arrived at a point that he can genuinely understand right and wrong and that he's done wrong and that he needs to be forgiven for that wrong, it's entirely appropriate to share with him the Gospel – that God will forgive him based upon Jesus' death on the cross.

*Student:* Thanks for explaining that because I was also curious: I wonder about this about people with disabilities, for example.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, exactly. I was thinking of the same thing as you described – the different rates at which people mature. Some never mature. Some are severely retarded mentally and never will reach more than a kind of childlike or infantile status. I think that God loves and has compassion upon those who are severely mentally impaired in that way.

### **END DISCUSSION**

I think this is a good point at which to close our class. Next time we will turn to the question of the nature of man. We'll look fairly closely at anthropological terms that are used first in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament to describe the nature of man – terms such as body, soul, and spirit.<sup>1</sup>

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