

WHAT IS MAN?

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Revelation contains both a subjective and an objective aspect. Each is essential for the manifestation of revelation, and the absence of either one causes revelation to be incomplete. Subjectively, there must be a revealer who is able to reveal himself. He must be a person, since revelation is from a person to a person, and he must be willing to reveal. However, no matter how complete the subjective aspect, without an objective receiver who can and will receive His disclosure, His revelation can never be complete. Hence the creation of man to receive God's revelation was imperative. In this Adamic Period, God progressively revealed man's creation, probation, propagation, and temptation.

A. Man's Creation (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7).

What is man? This is a universal question. On the hills of Judea about three thousand years ago a shepherd boy watched over his flock with tender care. Night after night, in quietness and solitude, he lifted his eyes heavenward and gazed upon the moon and stars in a seemingly endless sky. Time and time again, when overwhelmed with the vastness and splendor of the heavens contrasted with his own insignificance, he would break forth with this exclamatory question, "What is man?" (Ps. 8:4).

What is man? If we were to ask David, he would answer, "men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie" (Ps. 62:9). Ask Isaiah: "All flesh is grass" (Is. 40:6,7). Ask James: man is "a vapor, that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). Indeed, man is frail, insignificant and even wicked, yet he is the one whom God created for His glory. He is not just five dollars worth of chemical ingredients. Nor is he merely a mass of protoplasm on his way to becoming fertilizer for the soil. He is a creature into whom God has breathed His breath of life. Certainly he is not a god. Nor can he develop himself into a god. Yet he was created in God's image and after God's likeness. Man is a paradox. In one respect he is only a piece of clay, sinful and unclean. In another he is like unto God and has the capacity to become God's son. He is surely "fearfully and wonderfully made." Let us consider just how wonderfully he was made.

1. The Plan for Man's Creation. God, having revealed His creation of the earth and all things upon it, next revealed His creation of man. For this unique act He called a council in order to make a determinative resolution, saying, "Let us make man." The first person, plural number, "us" may be interpreted several ways. The most unintelligent one is to explain it as evidence of Hebraic polytheism, thus disregarding the pervading monotheistic concept in the context. Church fathers and earlier theologians interpreted it as an indication of the Trinity. The concept of the Trinity was surely included here, but one cannot say this was the full revelation of God's Trinity. Because of the nature of progressive revelation which develops gradually from a seed form and to avoid polytheistic implications, it was too early for God to give a full-formed revelation of the Trinity to the Hebrews. Besides these two extremes, some have interpreted it as a *pluralis majestatis*, which means the "we" or "us" commonly used by monarchs in their

decrees. Others took it as communicative, meaning that God was addressing the attendant angels around His throne. Neither of these, however, is supported by the Bible. The former was never adopted by the Hebrews, although it was used frequently by Mohammedans in the Koran, by Persians (Ezra 4:18), and by Greek monarchs. The latter is rejected by Isaiah 40:13-14 and 44:24. The most likely interpretation is that it is a plural of self-deliberation, which is not unusual in Scripture. Isaiah 6:8 is a good example: “us” in the clause “who will go for us” is the reflection or self-deliberation of “I” in the first clause “whom shall I send.” Another good example is in Genesis 11:5,7-8. The statement “Let us go down” in verse 7 can only be the reflection or self-deliberation of “the Lord came down” in verse 5, and of “the Lord scattered them abroad” in verse 8. What then is man that he requires so much of the triune God’s attention?

Three verbs are used in Scripture to illustrate man’s beginning (See Is. 43:7). Man was “created” (Gen. 1:27), which means man was a brand-new creation in this world. The verb “created,” according to its etymology, does not mean something out of nothing but the creation of something which did not previously exist. Big monkeys and huge apes could have existed in the pre-Adamic world, but not man. (Parts of various fossil apes have been discovered time and again. But zoologists and anthropologists have had to admit the Java man was half ape and half manlike; Zinjanthropus was different from man or developed away from man; and *homo habilis* denotes only “the ability to use tools and to stand and walk upright.” In other words they admit these fossils were not real men but manlike. Since they were only different kinds of apes that could have existed in the pre-Adamic world, there is little wonder why zoologists and anthropologists cannot find any substantial data to fill the gaps among the different stages of fossils.) Man did not evolve but was definitely God’s new creation on the renovated earth. In order to stress this, the word created was used three times to emphasize the truth that man was newly created on this earth and was neither pre-existent nor a product of evolution. It seems the Holy Spirit knew from the very beginning the trouble that evolution would cause, so He sealed man’s creation with a triple *bara*: “God **created** man . . . in the image of God **created** He him; male and female **created** He them.” Man was also “formed” (2:7), which means he was not produced immediately after God’s command as animals were. Nor was it the idea of kneading plastic clay and molding it into a human body, but he was created through a detailed procedure. Man was also “made” (1:26), for man’s body was not something out of nothing, but was made out of the dust of the ground.

2. The Pattern for Man’s Creation. The difference between man and animal was not only in the plan and the manner of man’s creation but also in the pattern for his creation. Other creatures were made “after their kind” by God’s commands, but man was created “in God’s image” and “after God’s likeness” by God’s decree. The interpretations of “image” and “likeness” have varied greatly. Augustine interpreted image as intellectuality or personality and likeness as moral virtue. The Greek Fathers emphasized the former, and the Latin Fathers emphasized the latter. Luther, however, took these two words as synonyms used for emphasis. Calvin took likeness to be an explanation of image. Charles Hodge said, “Image and likeness means an image which is like.”¹ These interpretations may have their value, but none are faithful enough to the very language of Scripture.

¹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), II, 96.

The argument that these two words are used as an emphatic repetition when supported by the usage of image (used alone) in Genesis 1:27 and likeness (used alone) in Genesis 5:1 is prejudicial rather than grammatical. The use of synecdoche² was the general practice of the writers of Scripture. Both the Old and the New Testament writers frequently used a part to express the whole or the whole for a part. The omission of one from the two words cannot be evidence of “two in one” at all. On the contrary, it might be evidence of “one for two.” The comparison of Genesis 5:1, where likeness alone is used with Genesis 5:3 where likeness and image are both used, is good support for the evidence of “one for two.” Besides, the creative act in Genesis 2:7 is also a good description for this interpretation. The phrase “formed man of the dust of the ground,” describes the creation of man’s external image, and the phrase, “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” sets forth the creation of man’s internal likeness, even after God’s likeness. Another argument, based on the lack of a *waw-copulativum* (and) between these two words, is also unwarranted. No serious Bible student would interpret the Hebrew formula “yesterday, the day before yesterday” (Ex. 5:14; 1 Sam. 20:27) as synonyms for emphasis; yet this phrase always occurs without a conjunction. The statement in Genesis 1:26 is so emphatic that the conjunction “and” is unnecessary.

The word “image” is used 34 times in the Old Testament: 17 times in Hebrew and 17 times in Aramaic. All of them are translated as image except one in Hebrew in Psalm 39:6 and one in Aramaic in Daniel 3:19, where they are translated “vain show” and “form” respectively. The Septuagint translators translated image in the Genesis passage as *eikon* which means “a figure, likeness.” *Eikon* is used 3 out of 23 times in the New Testament as referring to an abstract or internal likeness. Image in the Old Testament, however, refers only to a concrete or external image. Hence, image in Genesis 1:26 can only be God’s self-revealing image to man, such as the form He took when He appeared to Adam, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The question “How can God have an external image since He is Spirit?” is answered by the operation of the Trinity. God can be God without an image, but He cannot be the Trinity without an image. God’s Trinity can be viewed as a burning candle. The invisible center of the light represents the Father; the visible part, the Son; the heat or invisible but sensible part, the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary for light as light to have an image, but light as candlelight must have an image—the visible part. God cannot approach man as spirit only. Since man is material, God adopted a certain image to approach him. God the Son is that revelation of God, the image He chose before the foundation of the world through which to reveal Himself. It was in this image that He revealed Himself to Adam in the garden of Eden, to the patriarchs, to Moses (Num. 12:8), to Joshua (Josh. 5:13), to Gideon (Judg. 6:12ff), and to Manoah and his wife (Judg. 13:3,8-14). He was also seen in this image by Isaiah (Is. 6:1), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:25), and Daniel (Dan. 7:13). When Christ was in this world, He appeared with Moses and Elijah in this same image, with the highest degree of glory, in the presence of Peter, James, and John. According to the Gospel of Luke, both Moses and Elijah also appeared in their glorious images (Luke 9:31). Moreover, God created Adam according to this very image, even the revealing image of God the Son. What then

²Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part may be taken for the whole or vice versa, or a singular for the plural or vice versa.

is man? God reveals to us that man is a creature, not only wonderfully made, but made in the revealing image of God.

Not only was man created in the external image of God the Son, but he was also created after God's likeness. The word, "likeness" in Genesis 1:26, is used 25 times in the Old Testament. It is from a root meaning "to be like" and is rendered "likeness" 19 times out of the 25. Likeness can refer to either internal or external similarities. Its Greek equivalent (*eikon*) also refers to both likenesses: external being the emperor's head on a coin (Matt. 22:19-21) and internal being the divine moral and spiritual understanding according to which God refashions the believer's new nature (Col. 3:10). So from the etymological viewpoint, "image" and "likeness" both refer to the concrete or external image, without excluding, however, the meaning of internal likeness. Thus we conclude that God created man physically according to the external revealing image of God the Son and inwardly according to the internal likeness of God.

Quite a few interpretations of the phrase, "the likeness of God," have arisen in the history of the church. Reformed theologians took it to be man's moral virtues. To Luther it was "a thing unknown." Socinians, Remonstrants, and Rationalists insisted that it referred to dominion over God's creation. Most theologians feel that it refers to Adam's original righteousness, which he lost in the fall. Superficially, the last interpretation is very biblical, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." In reality, however, this interpretation by analogy is faulty because these theologians ignore or neglect the differences between the old creation and the new one (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The knowledge, righteousness, and holiness mentioned in Ephesians and Colossians are the factors of God's likeness in the new creation. This nature of a new man created in Christ Jesus was never present in Adam. The gospel of salvation in Christ is not a reconstruction of that which was lost in Adam. It is an entirely new work. Otherwise, the same righteousness which was lost by Adam could also be lost by those in Christ. Where then is eternal security? Furthermore, the theory that God's likeness was lost by Adam is not found in the Bible, but to the contrary, Scripture teaches that it is still present with man "who has been made in God's likeness" (James 3:9; see 1 Cor. 11:7). Beyond doubt God's likeness in man was changed after the fall, but it was never lost. The passage in Genesis 5:3 cannot be cited as proof of such a loss. The emphatic adjective "own" in the statement of "Adam . . . begat [a son] in his own likeness" is not in the original. We admit that God's image and likeness in man has been terribly damaged by sin, but not totally lost. Calvin said, "Wherefore, although we allow that the Divine image was not utterly annihilated and effaced in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is but horrible deformity."³ Precisely what is God's likeness after all?

Having formed man out of the dust of the ground, God breathed into man's nostrils something out of Himself which is translated into English as "breath" (2:7). As the result of this impartation, the lifeless body became a living soul. **This breath is the only thing which God and man have in common.** It enables man to have God's likeness on the one hand and to be distinguished from animals on the other. Since it is such an important word, and its meaning is much more than breath, I will use the original word *neshamah* instead of the translation "breath."

³John Allen (trans.), *Calvin's Institutes* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), Vol. I, p. 208.

Ancient Jewish scholars considered *neshamah* to be the highest perception within man. Occurring 24 times in the Old Testament (23 times in Hebrew and once in Aramaic), it is sometimes used to illustrate God's power in nature (Job 37:10; Ps. 18:15, Is. 30:33) and once to signify man's distinguishing trait (Is. 2:22). Twice it is used as a synonym for spirit and is translated as such in the Authorized Version (Job 26:4; Prov. 20:27). According to Scripture, *neshamah* has three functions within man, which are also expressions of the likeness of God after which man was created. One of them is the intellectual function, and the other two are spiritual functions.

The intellectual function of the *neshamah* is man's Godlike personality. When the *neshamah* was breathed by God into man, it immediately gave man life and made him a living soul. The life-giving function is seen not only in the statement but in the grammar as well. The grammatical construction of the phrase, "breath of life," clearly indicates that "breath" here is in the construct state and is in apposition to the genitive "life." The correct translation of this expression should be "the breath, that is to say, life," just as in John 2:21 "the temple of His body" means "the temple, that is to say, His body." So the *neshamah* was the very life of man which God gave to Adam. It was not God's own life. Man cannot have God's life by birth. He can have it only by believing in God's Word and accepting His life personally. This life (*neshamah*) is simply man's spirit. As Job says, "All the while my breath (*neshamah*) is in me, and the spirit (*ruach*) of God is in my nostrils" (Job 27:3). The genitive relation of spirit in the phrase "the spirit of God" is a subjective genitive meaning that God is the possessor or source of the spirit. From the parallels of *neshamah* to *ruach* and "in me" to "in my nostrils," one can easily realize that *neshamah* refers to man's spirit which has its source in God. Jesus says, "It is the spirit that quickeneth [that is, gives life]; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). This very spirit gave Adam life and made his body of dust a living soul. With this spirit man has a Godlike personality, and one day he may have dominion over the works of God's hand. Without it man is only a standing animal or a clothed gorilla.

The word "soul" (2:7) has been translated in more than 30 ways in the Old Testament. But when used for man it sometimes refers to his very self. The soul has the functions of intellect to think, of sensibility to feel, and of the will to make decisions as God does. Thus man was made of the dust of the ground, created by God's inbreathed *neshamah*, and as a result he had a Godlike personality. By personality we mean the three mental functions within our soul: self-consciousness, self-sensitiveness, and self-determination. Strictly speaking though, these three cannot be counted as man's real distinctiveness since they are also found in an inferior way in the brutes. The uniqueness of man is the work of the *neshamah* itself. It does not matter whether a person holds the dichotomous theory or the trichotomous theory, he has to admit there is a distinction between intellectual functions and spiritual functions. It is the former that makes man look man-ward; while the latter looks God-ward. It takes both functions to qualify man to take the test of obedience.

Man's *neshamah* possesses both an intellectual and a spiritual function but its first duty is spiritual activity. According to Scripture it performs two spiritual operations: spiritual perception and moral judgment. Man needs both operations working together to understand God, to think God's way, and to judge things according to God's judgment. Man's spiritual perception and moral judgment are created in the spiritual likeness of

God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Although these spiritual functions of the *neshamah* were seen in actions throughout this period, they were not revealed by statement at this time. A look at a few later revelations will help us to understand these two operations and their relations to man's probation.

The earliest revelation concerning **spiritual perception** as the first spiritual function of the *neshamah* is in Job 32:8. It says, "There is a spirit in man, even the *neshamah* of the Almighty that gives them understanding." Again, "the *neshamah* of the Almighty" is identical with "a spirit in man." Its job is to give man understanding. The verb "giveth understanding" is in the causative form, meaning "to cause to understand." The same form is used several times in Psalms 119 (See verses 27, 34, 73, 125, 144, 169) to refer to the understanding of spiritual things, such as God's precepts, God's law, God's commandment, and God's testimonies. The inbreathed *neshamah* gives man the understanding of God and of the things pertaining to God, that is, man has Godlike spiritual perception. This perception is immortal, being named "eternity" in Ecclesiastes 3:11, which reads, "He has made everything beautiful in its time: also He has set eternity [Authorized Version, "the world"] in their heart, without which [Authorized Version, "so that"] no man can find out the work that God does from the beginning to the end" (retranslated). (To translate *`olam* as "world" here as the Authorized Version does, theologically speaking, is inexcusably misleading, since "world" in this passage, according to the context, refers to worldly thoughts or cares, which would make God the author of sin. This would also make man's loving the world and the things pertaining to the world, instead of loving the Father, to be God's fault.) At the time of creation, God placed "eternity" in man so that he might perceive God's wisdom and power through the things which He made. "Eternity" is from the Hebrew verb meaning "to wrap up" or "to hide"; hence "a wrapping up" or "hiding" is used to express "long past" or "distant future" time, "life long" or "duration" of a person or the earth, and "eternity of God." In this passage, the last expression is preferred. The suggestion that eternity is akin to the Arabic *ilam* (understanding) is not necessarily implied here, since the context indicates clearly that eternity refers to the spiritual perception by which man is able to find God and the things pertaining to Him. In addition, "so that" is also an inaccurate translation. In the original, it is a negative particle *beli* prefixed with a preposition *min* and a common relative pronoun *`asher*. Together they simply mean "without which" indicating the necessity of having eternity in order to know God.

In summary, man is not only as he is because he has a Godlike personality but also because he has a Godlike understanding. He was endowed with spiritual perception and discernment so that he might be able to perceive spiritual things, discern divine truth, and know God's power and divinity (Rom. 1:19-20).

Neshamah's second spiritual function is in man's **conscience**. The passage concerning moral judgment as another function of the *neshamah* is in Proverbs 20:27, "The *neshamah* [Authorized Version, "spirit"] of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly." The word translated "candle" occurs 43 times in the Old Testament. It refers to lamps in general but also specifically refers to the candelabrum in the temple, which burned continually (Ex. 25:37; 35:14). Conscience, then, is like the temple's branched candlestick. It casts its rays of light into the darkened soul of man and brings to light the hidden things. The word translated "searches" is from

a verb meaning “to dig up.” It is a participle in Hebrew signifying a continual digging. Thus conscience, Godlike judgment, searches and digs into the depths of man’s soul unceasingly.

The origin of conscience has been a constant riddle to most philosophers and psychologists. Nowadays, conscience is considered to be the result of maturity, and its judgment is thought to be formed by parental discipline and environmental inhibitions. To many people conscience is strictly an environmental product and has nothing to do with God. Of course, conscience can be sharpened or dulled by the influence of society and family, but to state that conscience is the product of discipline and inhibition is to put the cart before the horse. **Conscience comes with birth.** Thus this wonderful verse, Proverbs 20:27, has answered all the fundamental questions concerning conscience: its name, its origin, and its function. Its name is man’s *neshamah* or God’s candle, its origin is from God, and its function is to search the innermost chambers of the heart, to tell God’s truth, and to witness for God’s justice.

The operations of conscience may be distinguished as antecedent (a guide before events happen) and sequent (a judge afterwards). Before a person’s will has made any decision to act, and while his mind is still deliberating, conscience either encourages him to go ahead or warns him of the danger in doing so. After the decision has been made and while all the mental faculties are occupied by action, conscience usually keeps quiet, waiting for her sequent action. When the act is completed and all the mental faculties are relaxed, she either crowns the person with satisfaction and gives him a good conscience, or she renders judgment and gives him a bad or guilty conscience. She may retreat under pressure but will never surrender. Whenever the pressure is gone or she is strengthened, she will renew her judgment immediately. If there is no chance for her to carry out her verdict in this life, she will do it in the life beyond: “Their conscience also bearing witness . . . In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:15-16). Listen further to what the Lord said, “And I say to you, that every idle or unprofitable word that men speak, they shall give account for it in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36 retranslated).

Bible students often prefer to believe that conscience came into existence after the fall. Some even think that the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil actually produced conscience. Driver said:

The command is broken; and man falls thereby from his state of innocence, and forfeits the blessing of the Divine favor and the Divine presence, which he had before enjoyed It is the awakening conscience of the human race, the awakening of the right and wrong.⁴

God did not reveal in words whether or not man had a conscience before the fall. Nevertheless, the narrative as a whole indicates that he did. First, conscience was one of the functions of the *neshamah* which he received from the very beginning. Second, without conscience God’s command concerning “good and evil” would be meaningless to man, and thus His judgment upon an ignorant one would be unjust. Some may argue here that Adam did have a standard to follow, namely, the commandment not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is certainly true. Yet without

⁴S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methven and Company, 1904), 517.

conscience, the objective standard would never have been subjectively effective in Adam. J. J. Van Oosterzee mentioned that once a child gave a striking definition for conscience, saying, “It is that with which we cannot do what we like.”⁵ Without a conscience in man the objective precept would have been totally ineffective.

A proof of the existence of conscience before the fall is the immediate operation of the moral judgment after the fall. As soon as the sinful act was over, the first pair knew they were naked and felt ashamed. Where did that conscience which felt guilty come from? It seems unlikely it was created by their disobedience. A judge may have the principles of law, but he has no way to apply them until a concrete case is laid before him. Likewise, conscience was there before the fall but did not act until the concrete case of the fall arose.

A few words concerning the relationship between man’s spiritual understanding and conscience will conclude our discussion of the two spiritual functions of the *neshamah*. Although these two are brought up together and stay in the same family, their undertakings are different. The assignment for spiritual perception is to know God and the things pertaining to Him, and for conscience it is to bear testimony to God and to execute the moral judgment of God according to the judicial knowledge obtained from the spiritual perception. In the realm of spiritual knowledge, conscience tells us nothing because that lies in the sphere of spiritual perception, but in judicial affairs, conscience holds sway. When our *neshamah* receives illumination or enlightenment from God, spiritual perception analyzes it, interprets it, and makes its judicial rendering known to conscience. Accepting it as the moral standard, conscience encourages, rewards, warns, or condemns man accordingly. In salvation conscience takes its stand on law; spiritual perception stands on grace. Conscience tells sinners to do right; spiritual perception suggests what is the right thing to do. While conscience condemns sinners according to their sinful state, spiritual perception presents to sinners the way of salvation accomplished by Christ on Calvary, even the cleansing power of Christ’s blood which cleanses the conscience from dead works. They are two in one. While one is healthy, the other is strong; but when one is defiled, the other is also polluted (Titus 1:15). They resemble the eyes and ears mentioned in Acts 28:26-27: “Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive.” While the ears are dull, the eyes are closed. However, when the eyes see, the ears hear. In other words, the right moral judgment from conscience is dependent on the right understanding of spiritual perception, and the development of the conscience is according to the renewing of the spiritual perception (See Rom. 12:2).

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⁵J.J. Van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. John W. Watson and Maurice J. Evans (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, n.d.), p. 25.