

The Nature of Man

by Pastor Marty

The last newsletter described our need to evaluate what we truly believe about God in light of what the scriptures actually say about Him. We often describe God as all-powerful (or omnipotent) and interpret that to mean He can do anything. The problem is that, as we saw, God cannot do “anything” if we include those things that are contrary to His nature—such as telling a lie, breaking His Word, or doing what is evil. Since there is no darkness in Him, He is simply not able to do those things that He also associates with darkness and evil. Some might say that God could still do “evil” if He wanted, but He just doesn’t ever want to ... or that if He did it, it would no longer be evil. Both of these statements are not only faulty but also reflect a serious problem in our theology; they elevate a concept of omnipotence to a level greater than God’s own nature. It reduces God’s holiness to something defined by the Euthyphro dilemma: either a thing is holy because God calls it holy, or God calls something holy because it is holy. Both options drastically reduce His holiness to an arbitrary or an inferior state. Instead, we are reminded by Jesus that there is NO darkness in God at all. We need to recognize that all the things that God describes as good, holy, or true are those things that proceed from and reflect His nature. For example, marriage is not holy *because* God decided it would be holy, nor did He call it holy because it *already was* holy in some *ultimate* sense; marriage *is* holy because the covenant bond made between a man and a woman before God is a *reflection* of the perfect harmony and unity within the Godhead. In the same way, God hates divorce—not because He decided to or was obligated to but because it is a breaking of what is, by definition, permanent.

A thing is holy, good, or true not because God says so but because it reflects Him.

Of course, there are two qualifications I need to make here. First, there are some things that fall under the realm of obedience without being related to God’s nature. For example, the Old Testament dietary laws were designated to protect His people from sickness and disease; they were not reflections of His holiness. How do we know this? We know this because Jesus, who told us that God is unchanging, abolished them. If they had been based on God’s nature, and then they changed, then He had to change. Sometimes, a command is based upon situation or condition. This is why dietary and cleanliness laws changed while moral and ethical laws only became clearer; the former was temporary, but the latter is permanent. Second, just because a thing is meant to be holy does not mean it can’t be perverted. Sex, the physical union between a man and woman, is holy within the marriage covenant, but it is fornication or adultery in any other context. Likewise, marriage can be other than it was meant to be if based on deception, coercion, or other ungodly motives. Of course, this raises important questions: do holy things remain holy when they are removed from their intended contexts? Do they become something else entirely? Are they always black and white?

Do holy things remain holy when they are removed from their intended context?

These questions bring us to a discussion of the nature of mankind. (For this newsletter, I will occasionally be using “man” in reference to the entire species). We could not really discuss the nature of human beings until we first laid a foundation on the nature of God as absolute, perfect, and unchanging. He does not change at all, so His truth, holiness, light, and love are also absolute and unchanging. To learn about man’s nature, we have to look back to the beginning when God first created the world. He made all

kinds of plants and animals, but it is only when He plans to make man that He declares they will be in His image, male and female. This does not mean man and woman are identical, for we recognize differences, not only biologically but also psychologically, spiritually, etc. (I discussed the true masculine and true feminine in prior newsletters). As different as man and woman may be, however, those differences disappear when we examine human nature as compared to the nature of the Creator who made them. We can see this clearly when we think of plants and animals. If we compare a carrot to a string bean, they are about as different as can be—until we compare them to horses; at that point, the gap between a stallion and salad makes any difference between vegetables irrelevant. Also, a cat and a dog may seem to be opposites, but when we compare them to people, we wind up with just pets and owners. (I will leave it up to you to decide which is which). In comparison to God, all other differences simply disappear.

Differences between man and woman are lost when compared to the nature of God.

As we begin to describe human nature, it is necessary to remember that, as God said, He made man in His image. The big question is what does that mean? It certainly doesn't mean that people are omnipotent, omniscient, or any of the other absolutes we use for God. Some theologies use that verse to reference God as a Trinity and man having a spirit, soul, and body; that may be true, but it does not really tell us very much about the nature of human beings. I am prone to think it deals with human nature in a much deeper way. If we examine where God declared the intent to make man in His image, He immediately follows by saying that man and woman would then rule over creation. This is a significant point. Ruling can include negative or harmful aspects to it, and we have seen it lead to slavery, abuse, and exploitation; however, it was not how God meant it. His intention was to

have man and woman be leaders on the earth, taking care of creation. We know from passages in these first chapters that it was a leadership involving care and stewardship instead of just control. None of the animals were described as being able to care after the others. The man and woman are made to rule over creation in a way that also fits with the command to care for the garden. This exemplifies the idea of servant leadership: a position that oversees while it is simultaneously submitting to God's authority.

Human nature is to lead while serving, to oversee while submitting fully to God.

Another thing we discover from reading our Bible is that people make things. Of course, not all of them are good—such as idols, pagan altars, and towers reaching into heaven. Ouija boards, atomic bombs, and gas chambers are a few of the evils that have followed since those ancient times. However, there have also been many wonderful things mankind has created in the fields of medicine, literature, architecture, art, and technology. Even if we focus on media, we see drama, fiction, fantasy, science fiction, mystery, etc., and all of those genres contain hundreds of variations. People have an ability to receive inspiration—to imagine something and then bring it forth. Some inspirations are from God while others clearly originate from a different source. In either case, the ability to imagine and to create is part of human nature. We might argue that animals also do this to a limited extent, for bees create honeycombs, birds make nests, and beavers make dams. However, these are more instinct built into their DNA than inspiration. If we are honest, we know that Charlotte learning new words to save Wilbur isn't factual. Animals do make some spectacular things in nature, but that isn't the same as the capacity to invent and create.

Human nature also includes an ability to receive inspiration and create new things.

Another thing we discover about human nature is that it involves making decisions. It is related to the concept of free will. God did not make mankind to be a race of slaves, robots, or zombies. Before sin ever entered the equation, man and woman had the choice of obedience or disobedience; they could either obey God or eat from the one tree off-limits to them. Their ability to choose existed before they sinned. It is how God made us. Even in an unredeemed state when we are enslaved to sin, we still have the ability to make choices. God constantly calls out to people to “choose life” instead of death. God cannot lie, so He is not implying one thing when another is actually the truth: He wouldn’t command us to “choose life” if we did not have any ability to do so in the first place. He judges us for the sins we commit precisely because He created us with the ability to resist sin. The fact that we cannot live a perfect sinless life without Jesus does not mean we are powerless against the temptations before us. God had very harsh words for the Israelites who said they could not help running after idols. We see Noah, Moses, Ruth, Deborah, and others making good choices even with their limitations, and we see others, such as Saul and Hezekiah, make very bad ones. It is possible for any person to make choices in life. Of course, making choices may be harder if people have had a drug, gambling, alcohol, sex, or other addiction, but they still never lose the ability to make choices. As long as we are alive, we have the power to choose right from wrong as well as hundreds of other decision we make every day. Part of our God-given human nature is that we make choices on the path before us.

Human nature sees the different paths before us & decides which way we will go.

If we think about it for a minute, we are able to see that the abilities to lead and care, to invent and create, and to choose and decide all reflect aspects of God’s nature. In all of these respects, human beings, made in His image, are

reflecting God’s nature. All of those abilities are foremost in God. This suggests what could be a much more significant meaning to the passage that states we are made “in His image.” It is a great deal more than simply our having a spirit, a soul, and a body; it is about what we can do that makes us unique in creation. If we think on the word “image” in scripture, it is something that looks like and represents something else. It is interesting that Israel over and over again fell into idol worship; the tendency to make a thing to worship is extremely strong. Even when the people of God stopped worshipping idols, they tended to just replace one type of idolatry with another. Even in the Church, Christians tend to elevate people or beliefs above God Himself. It is part of our fallen nature. This raises one very important question: if idolatry is a result of our fallen human nature, what aspect of our nature is affected? Clearly, it is our ability to worship, but I think it is more than just that. If it was just “worship” gone wrong, why do we have such a strong impulse to have an “image” for worship? God forbids us from making any image on earth to represent Him. If we take a close look at His Word, we may discover that the reason is that WE are the image of God on the earth. We are meant to reflect who He is to the whole world. A primary aspect of human nature is that we are reflections of Him on the earth. We are not to MAKE an image because we ARE the image.

Human nature means being the image of God, reflecting who He is to the world.

So far, we have looked at different ways human nature is a reflection of God’s nature. If we are not deceived, we will also quickly admit that there are significant ways we are NOT like God. This is not just because we are fallen, for Adam and Eve were tempted to eat the fruit so they could “become like God.” Some preachers are apt to say, “they already were like God.” As we have discussed, there is some truth to this. However, It is not the whole truth. Mankind is

different from God—and it is not just because man and woman are created beings. We have already mentioned some aspects of our nature that differs from other members of creation. If we think about it, another should easily come to mind that is unique—even if we include the non-earthly creation of supernatural beings: we have the unique ability to change and become something different. Human beings alone seem to have an inherent ability to repent. The ability to sin is not unique to humanity, for we read of Lucifer sinning along with a third of the angels. However, it seems that human beings alone are able to change. That is what repentance is—it is changing and becoming something different. It is more than a decision, for it also involves the choice to become something more than we are. God may change His mind, but He Himself does not change because He is already perfect. Man and woman alone have the ability to become a new creation. Even as we obey the voice of the Spirit, we are “changed from glory to glory” and become something greater. We alone in all of creation have the ability to continually change. We are able to evolve (in an eternal sense) and become something other than we were before.

Human nature includes being able to change and become something different.

The ability to change and become other than we were before is a dangerous thing. It is positive and negative. We have the ability to be something greater, but we can also choose the opposite, to become something less. As C. S. Lewis described it, if becoming a Christian does not make a person a great deal better, it will make a person a great deal worse. Redemption empowers the ability to change that is built into human nature. As we see in scripture, angels do have an ability to choose, for some chose badly. Once they made that decision, however, their fates were sealed. Human beings alone have an ability to continually go back and forth. We sin, we repent, we follow God, we fall, we get back

up, and the cycle continues until we die. This is part of the unique nature God placed in us: the “becoming” that is a part of us. Even the first man and woman were expect to become more than they were on the first day. If they had not sinned, they would be continually learning and growing in relationship with God. When we get to Heaven, we won’t immediately know all that there is to know about God and the universe. It will be just the beginning of a glorious eternal adventure of discovery, learning about God and creation. We must stop thinking about Heaven as the end of the journey. There is a reason He will recreate the earth and give us new bodies: we are returning to the original garden path the first man and woman left. It is the great reboot.

Heaven is not the end of the journey; it is the great reboot when we all start over.

God created man and woman to be like Him as well as different. He wanted beings who could be in relationship with Him. Angels could worship and serve Him, and the choice of some to follow Lucifer meant they had free will; what they did not have, however, was the ability to be continually becoming more, evolving greater throughout eternity. God is unchanging, but if we think that means we can ever fully know all there is to know, we are severely mistaken. He is eternal and infinite, without any beginning or end. We know that part of God’s nature is love. A significant aspect of love is the joy found in expressing itself. God desires this relationship with us to include always being able to express His love to us; however, His love never ends. He found the solution by creating something new. He created a creature who not only was able to choose to love Him but also would be forever growing, always becoming, eternally increasing in its capacity to understand and receive more. Human nature is the ability to reflect who God is while forever becoming more and more like Him while never losing the joy and wonder of discovering that there is always more to come.