

TOWARD A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF MAN

Let it be noted at the outset that we will be using the word “man” as a generic reference to “mankind” or “humanity.” Though the English word “man” can be used to refer to a male as distinguished from a female, such gender distinctions are not our intention in this article, and all references to “man” are inclusive of both male and female. I make this clarification to avoid any charges of gender bias in the numerous references to “man” throughout this study.

The question, “What is man?” is an ancient question, asked by mankind through the centuries. In what some regard as the oldest of all the Old Testament literature, we find Job asking God the question, “What is man that Thou dost magnify him, and that Thou art concerned about him? (Job 7:17). The Psalmist David ponders man’s significance, and writes,

“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet...” (Psalm 8:3-6)

Again, David asks the same question:

“O Lord, what is man, that Thou dost take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that Thou dost think of him? Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow.” (Psalm 144:3,4).

Men in every age are obliged to consider what, who, and why they are.

Is the study of humanity called “humanism”? No. The study of humanity or man is called “anthropology,” derived from two Greek words: *anthropos*, meaning “man”, and *logos*, meaning “word, logic, or study of”. So, the study we are undertaking is a consideration of man, or a study of anthropology, from a Christian perspective.

Since there is some confusion concerning the words that have “human” in them, it will be instructive to begin with some definitions:

“Human, humanity” – the way God created us as mankind.

“Humane” – sympathy and compassion for other human beings.

“Humanitarianism” – benevolent actions toward other humans.

“Humanities” – educational disciplines which study the enculturation of humans.

“Humanism” – a philosophical pattern of thinking with presuppositions of human autonomy and independency.

The humanistic premises of self-potentiality and self-sufficiency are so pervasive in modern thought that most people have unknowingly accepted these foundational tenets as the anthropological paradigm of their worldview. Many a child, from the time when their parents first placed them on their knee and began to read to them, can remember the story of *The Little Train That Could* – how the little engine had to pull the train up a mountain, and by repeating, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can,” he did it! Such positive thinking or possibility thinking of self-reliance, engaging in self-assertive self-talk to facilitate self-actualizing self-achievement is at the center of the modern humanistic mindset.

The presuppositions of this “train of thought” are that all things start with man’s inherent ability and potential. The Humanist Bible (if there is such a book) must surely begin with a different rendering of Genesis 1:1: “*In the beginning, man* commenced to be everything he could be, and to do what he was convinced he could do. Man willed it all into being by his own self-

determination. On the sixth day he created the concept of ‘god’, and perfected the concept in the progressive sharing of many human cultures.”

This premise posits that man is the highest being that exists, and that mankind is its own center of reference. Man is regarded as the cause of his own effects, the means to his own ends, and the master of his own fate. Inherent in man are the capabilities to “do his own thing,” chart his own course, run his own show, and solve his own problems. The fact that man has problems only calls for self-improvement – the “how to” formulas for which can be found in the self-help section of any bookstore. If man could just “get his act together,” individually and collectively, by the self-actualizing self-realization of self-perfection, then man could create a utopian heaven on earth. Implicit in humanism’s thesis of man is the seldom identified or articulated objective of self-deification.

Humanism creates for itself a paradoxical problem. On the one hand this man-centered perspective diminishes man to less than mankind is, by viewing man as but an animal who feeds, bleeds, and breeds like any other animal. On the other hand, there is the tendency to deify man as more than mankind is, by regarding each human being as an “independent self” capable of self-originating self-generation, directing himself toward self-perfection and self-deification.

The philosophy of humanism regards mankind to *be* what only God *is*, and believes that man is capable of *doing* what only God can *do*. It is diametrically opposed, 180° opposite, to “a Christian understanding of man.”

To explicate such “a Christian understanding of man,” in contrast to humanistic thought, we will format the study with these statements:

What God *is*, man *is not*.

What God *does*, man *cannot do*.

What man *is*, *is* what he was *created to be*.

What man *does*, must be *derived* from another.

Who man *is*, must be *derived* from another.

Why man *is* what and who he *is*.

What God *is*, man *is not*.

If the statement that “what God *is*, only God *is*” is valid, then the logical corollary is that “what God *is*, man *is not*.”

God *is* God, and man *is* man. God *is* Self-existent, and man exists because God created him. God *is* Creator, and man is the creature. Thereby we maintain the necessary distinction between the Creator and the creation.

Man is not God, or a god, and never becomes such. Nor does man function as God, or even as a “co-god.” When God created man, He created *out of* Himself, that which was not Himself. The designation and attributes of God cannot be applied to man. Some have attempted to explain that Jesus’ comment to the Jewish leaders, “I said, ‘You are gods’” (John 10:34,35), is a declaration that a man can *be* or *become* “a god.” Such an interpretation is invalid. Jesus was toying with the religious leaders, and used their own hermeneutic techniques of over-literalism and semantic double-talk to expose their irrational responses to Him. Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6, where the magistrates were regarded as having the authority of God, and were called “gods,” in a similar sense as some governmental leaders are still called “lords” today. Jesus knew full well that the situation He was confronting was not equivalent to that being described by the Psalmist.

He knew that the Jewish authorities were not upset that he was claiming to act as “a god” with the authority of God, but that He was claiming to *be* God. He could legitimately claim to *be* God because He *was* God, but there is nothing in this text that allows an interpretation that any other man can *be* or *become* “a god.”

Man is not an extension of God or a derivative of God. When “derivative” is used as a noun, it implies the taking of one object and adding to it to create another object. A language derivative, for example, takes a word and adds to it to make another word, which is called a “derivative” of the word from which it originated. A chemical derivative is formed when one chemical substance is added to another to form a chemical “derivative.” God did not take some of Himself and add to that in order to make a “derivative” of Himself. Such an equation is invalid: God + something = man. Never! In such case, man is something *more* than God. In actuality, man is a creature who is *less* than God, and not a “derivative of God.” But, when “derivative” is used as an adjective, we can (and will) state that man is a “derivative creature,” which functions by deriving from a spiritual source.

The statement under consideration is, “what God *is*, man *is* not.” God *is* Person, and yet we refer to human beings as “persons.” God is Trinitarian relational Personhood, and as such is the basis and source of all proper interpersonal relationships among His human creatures. Man cannot *be* Person in that sense. We cannot make statements like: “As God is Person, so man is person,” or “God is Person, and He created man to be a person like Himself.” Rather, we should explain, God is Trinitarian relational Person, and He has created human beings as persons with the capability of relationality and sociability, both with the Persons of the Godhead and with other men.

Likewise, God *is* Spirit. As Trinitarian relational Spirit, God is the source of all genuine worship of His own worthy Triune Being. Man *is not* Spirit in this sense. Statements such as, “Man is spirit in the same way that God is spirit,” or “Man is a spirit-being just as God is a Spirit-Being,” are not valid. It is more legitimate to explain that God, as Trinitarian relational Spirit, created mankind with spiritual, psychological, and physiological function. Man is, therefore, capable of participating in a “one spirit” (I Cor. 6:17) union with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and of having a relational “unity of spirit” with other Christians. Together, Christians can participate in a spiritual community of spiritual worship, extolling the “worth-ship” of the character of God.

We could continue to note that God *is* essentially and intrinsically love, goodness, righteousness, holiness, truth, life, power, etc. It is not that God *has* such virtues to dispense, but these are what God *is*. They are the character of God. “What God *is*, man *is not*.” We cannot claim that man *is* any of the above stated character attributes, at least not in the same sense that God *is*.

God *is* immortal and eternal (I Tim. 1:17) and “alone possesses immortality” (I Tim. 6:16). What God *is*, man *is not*. Man is physically mortal, and “it is appointed unto man to die...” (Heb. 9:27). Upon his death, man does not possess any inherent immortality whereby he, or any part of him, will live forever. Only in conjoined union with the Immortal One do we have the “life and immortality that was brought to light through the gospel” (II Tim. 1:10).

God is immune to temptation. “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13). Man, on the other hand, is tempted. Temptation is part of the privilege of being a human choosing creature, with a true choice of alternatives. But “God is faithful, and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able” (I Cor. 10:13).

God *is* Self-sufficient. No one outside of God influences or controls His actions. God *is* unconditioned, uncontingent, and unconstrained. God *is* autonomous and independent. He *is* a law unto Himself. He *is* His own center of reference. God *is* “Independent Self.” What God *is*, man is *not*! Humanism attempts to explain that man *is* what only God *is* – that man *is* an “independent self”, autonomous and self-sufficient, which can generate his own character and activity from his own center of reference, as a law unto himself. Humanism is a fallacy that attempts to project man as God.

What God *does*, man *cannot do*.

Since “God *does* what He *does*, because He *is* Who He *is*,” we can therefore affirm that “what God *does*, man *cannot do*,” because man *is not* God.

The question was asked previously, “What is the prime function of God?” We answered by indicating that the prime function of God is *activity*. God *acts* like the God that He *is*. He *does* what He *does*, because He *is* Who He *is*.

When God *acts* out of His own Being, what is that action called? It is the *Grace* of God. Though God’s grace has often been defined in limited association with redemption, we must broaden the definition of *grace* to mean “God in action, consistent with, and expressive of, His own Being.” What God *does*, acting in grace by expressing His own Being, man *cannot do*! It should be noted that God *acts* in *grace*, but He *does not act* by *faith*. That would make God conditioned, contingent, and dependent, which He cannot be. Since *faith* is defined as man’s receptivity of God’s activity; man’s availability to God’s ability; or man’s dependence on God’s deity, it is impossible for God to act in faith. God’s function and man’s function are not the same.

God *does* what He *does*, because He *is* Self-generating and Self-producing. God does not have to *rely* on anyone outside of Himself. He does not have to *depend* on another, *draw from* another, or *trust* another (all of which are *faith* words that cannot be applied to God). God is Self-sufficient. Man is not self-sufficient and self-generating, despite what humanism advocates.

In the previous study of God it was noted, “God *does* what He *does*, *out of* Himself.” Everything that God *does* has its origin in God’s own Being, and is Self-empowered. God’s activity is *ek eautos*, “out of Himself,” i.e. *ek theos*, “out of God.” Man’s activity is not *ek eautos*, “out of himself.” Man does not have a generative source within himself to empower self-produced character and activity. That is why the apostle Paul wrote: “Not one of us lives to (for) himself...” (Rom. 14:7). “Not that we are adequate in ourselves, to consider anything as coming from ourselves (*ek eautos*)” (II Cor. 3:5). But as Christians, “we have this treasure (Christ) in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, not out of (*ek*) us” (II Cor. 4:7). Man is not self-empowered or capable of functioning *ek eautos*, “out of himself.”

Point by point we document that the humanistic premises of man’s self-potentiality are not consistent with a Christian understanding of God or man. Christianity and humanism are mutually antithetical.

What man *is*, is what he was *created to be*.

What is man? Man is a *creature* created by the Creator God to be a *contingent creature*. Beyond that, man is a *personal creature* – not essential Personhood as God alone is, but a

personal creature capable of interpersonal relationships with God and with other men. Man is a *social creature*, who needs both God and other people.

Man is a *human creature*, often referred to as a “human being.” We must explain that there is nothing wrong with being human. God created human creatures, and “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). It is worth noting that after creating all previous forms of creation, God affirmed that it was “good” (cf. Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25), but it was only after God created human creatures that God affirmed it to be “*very good*” (Gen. 1:31) – and that was *after* God created them “male and female” (Gen. 1:27) and told them to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). There is nothing wrong with being human, and nothing intrinsically sinful about human sexuality.

Man is always a human creature. He cannot be God, or a god. He cannot be Satan, or a devil. Man is never more than human, and he is never less than human. An individual human being in a fallen, unregenerate spiritual condition is not sub-human, or less than human. A Christian whose spirit has been regenerated is not super-human, or more than human. Human creatures we were created to be, and human creatures we will always be.

Human creatures were created by God to function and live on three different levels. The apostle Paul refers to our “spirit, soul, and body” (I Thess. 5:23) being kept in blameless function until the coming of Christ. These are not three parts, partitions, or compartments within man, so it is advisable to avoid such terminology as the “tripartite nature” of man or the “trichotomy” (meaning “cut in three”) of man. It is more Biblical to refer to man as a unified whole human creature which functions spiritually, psychologically, and physiologically. Traditional Christian teaching has tended to combine the spiritual and the psychological, and to refer to only two levels of function. They often cite Paul’s statement, “the *outer* man is decaying, yet our *inner* man is being renewed day by day” (II Cor. 4:16). They also point out that Jesus referred only to “*soul and body*” in Matthew 10:28. There is obviously the seen and the unseen parts of man – the visible and the invisible, the inner and the outer, the internal and the external, the corporeal and the incorporeal, the tangible and the intangible, etc. But such merging of the spiritual and the psychological functions of man opens anthropological understanding to the dualism of Platonic Greek philosophy. It also disallows the differentiation of spiritual derivation and indwelling from the psychological implementation of human behavior. This failure to differentiate the spiritual and the psychological has led to the common humanistic explanation of describing all spiritual phenomenon in psychological terms as William James did in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and as is commonplace in evangelical humanism today. If the spiritual and the psychological are not carefully distinguished, then psychological solutions should suffice for man’s problems, and Sigmund Freud is our Savior – God forbid! It is imperative that we understand the spiritual, psychological, and physiological functioning of man, and differentiate the spiritual from the psychological.

The human creature was created with the capacity of *spiritual function*. This is not to say that man *is* spirit in the same sense that God *is* Spirit. Neither do we mean to state that man is essentially “*a spirit*” or “*a spirit-being*”. The spirit of man is not just his “invisible part,” as some have attempted to interpret the statement that “God *is* Spirit.” Man is a human creature created with the capacity of spiritual function, unlike any other part of God’s created order. It is not that man has a soul, or has psychological function of behavior, that differentiates man from the animal kingdom, but that man has the capacity for spiritual function. The spiritual function of man sets the human race above the rest of the created order with a distinctive capacity of spiritual relation and spiritual worship. This capacity for spiritual function is not an intrinsic

functional capability. There is no independent function of the human spirit, or else man is an “independent self,” as only God *is*. The human spirit of man cannot self-generate, self-actuate, or self-implement any function. Watchman Nee alleged that the human spirit had an inherent functional capability of conscience, intuition, and communion, but his own citations of Scripture do not support such.¹ Norman P. Grubb attributed three basic faculties to the human spirit: (1) heart, being an intrinsic love-faculty, (2) mind, the knowing-faculty, and (3) will, where motivational choices are made.² There is no Biblical justification for such attributions of intrinsic capability of spiritual function in man. When any intrinsic capability is attributed to man’s spiritual function, the human creature is necessarily defined as an “independent self,” capable of self-actuating spiritual function, and thus deified.

The human spirit of man is best understood as the capacity for spiritual function, requiring a spiritual personage beyond man, either God or Satan, to empower, energize, and generate character and activity in the behavior of man. Either “God is at work (energizing) in us, both to will and to work for God’s good please” (Phil. 2:13), or “the prince of the power of the air is the spirit working (energizing) in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). The human spirit, the capacity for spiritual function, is the receptacle or habitational abode for either the divine Spirit or the diabolic spirit. God’s intent, of course, was that His Spirit might dwell in the spirit of man in order to empower, generate and produce divine character expressed in the behavior of the human creature. With that objective in mind, the Lord “formed the spirit of man within him” (Zech. 12:1). In the original man, “the Lord God breathed into him the spirit of lives” (Gen. 2:7), and man became a spiritually and behaviorally functional creature. After the fall of man into sin, God sent His Son, Who by His death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecostal outpouring serves as the Spirit of Christ Who “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16), and provides the indwelling basis of our being able to “worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

The *psychological function* of the human creature is shared with the animal kingdom, though man was obviously created with advanced behavioral faculties beyond what any animal is capable of. Human rationality, in particular, has been emphasized as the prime distinction between human and animal behavior.

The human soul (Greek word *psuche*), the psychological function of man, has been the subject of much investigation since the introduction of psychology as an educational discipline in the 19th century. The studies of Freud, Jung, *et al*, have produced many divergent theories of how and why humanity behaves as it does, as well as the abnormalities of human behavior. The vast majority of psychological study has been undertaken by researchers who accept the humanistic presuppositions of man’s autonomy and self-potentiality. This has led some Christians to improperly denigrate all psychological study. There is nothing wrong with “psychology,” *per se*, for there is always the need for legitimate study of human behavior. There is an even greater need to analyze and explain human behavior from a Christian perspective.

From its inception, the discipline of psychology has recognized that man behaves with the faculties of mind, emotion, and will. These mental, emotional, and volitional capabilities allow man to employ reason, to have affection, and to make decisions. The fallacy of humanism comes into play when these abilities to think, feel, and choose are regarded as the impetus for self-produced behavior.

Since man’s volitional capability of willed choice is particularly alleged by humanistic understanding to be the agency of self-actuated behavior, it is important to consider the will of man more carefully. God created the human creature as a *choosing creature*. Man is not a

mechanical automaton. Nor is man a marionette that responds as someone pulls the strings. Man is a choosing creature whose psychological function involves freedom of choice. Each individual must live with the consequences of his own choices (cf. Col. 3:25). Freedom of choice, however, must be carefully distinguished from “free-will.” God alone has “free-will” to Self-determinatively and Self-generatively will into action whatever He pleases – the context of such freedom being only His own character. Man, the human creature, *does not have “free-will”* to self-determinatively self-actuate his own character and behavior.

It was this idea of self-generative “free-will” in man that Martin Luther was objecting to in his classic book, *The Bondage of the Will*.³ He charges Erasmus, the humanist, with deifying man by attributing to man a self-generative “free-will” that exceeded the human self-sufficiency advocated by the Pelagians of the 5th century. Protestantism, in general, does not seem to have understood what Luther was objecting to, and has generally followed the humanist thinking of Erasmus rather than the Christian perspective of Luther.

Man’s freedom of choice *does* allow man to be self-determinative, but not in the humanistic sense of being able to self-generate and self-actuate the character of his behavior. The free choices of the human creature are response-choices, rather than generation-choices. Human beings have a responsibility, a response-ability, to freely choose, decide, and determine to be receptive to and derive from a spiritual source. Man’s choices are faith-choices of receptivity and derivation, as will be considered in the following section.

The differentiation of *spiritual function* and *psychological function* within the Christian can be seen in Hebrews 4:12:

“The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Jesus Christ, as the “Word of God” (cf. Jn. 1:1,14) is divinely operative in causing the Christian individual to differentiate between psychological motivations and spiritual motivation. Instead of the humanistically patterned thoughts and self-oriented desires to “be all one can be” for God, thinking that one can please Him through such self-generated commitment and dedication, the Spirit of Christ wants us to be aware of and recognize His spiritual intent within our spirit to operate with “the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16) in accord with our willingness to be receptive to the dynamic of God’s grace.

Physiological function within the physical body of the human creature is the third level of human function to be considered. The physical body is the external instrument of expression for the character and behavior that is generated spiritually and mobilized psychologically in man.

A Christian understanding of man must never fall prey to the polarized dualistic concept of Greek Platonism, wherein all things associated with the physical body were regarded as evil, and all things associated with the spirit were regarded as good. There is nothing wrong, evil, or sinful about the human body. God created us with physicality, with a physical body designed for physiological function, and determined that it was “*very good*” (Gen. 1:31). Our physical body is not a nemesis that plagues us with physical needs and desires of sensuality. The physical body, with all its needs, drives, and desires, was created by God, and should not be viewed with disapproval. Just as General Motors used to put a marker on every automobile, “Body made by Fisher,” so every human creature can proudly, and without hesitation, declare, “Body made by God.”

The apostle Paul mentions his desire that “the life of Jesus might be manifested in our *body ...in our mortal flesh*” (II Cor. 4:10,11). In these verses, *body* (Greek *soma*) and *flesh*

(Greek *sarx*) are used equivalently. Elsewhere (cf. Rom. 7:18,25; 8:4-13; Gal. 5:16-24), Paul uses the word “flesh” to refer to a patterning of selfish and sinful orientation within the desires of man’s soul, in a manner that must not be identified or equated with the physicality of the human body. In fact, Paul’s use of “flesh” in this latter sense, as a patterning of human desires toward selfishness and sinfulness, has nothing to do with how God constituted mankind as a human creature – physically, psychologically, or spiritually. No man is born with the “flesh” in this behavioral sense, for it is an idiosyncratically acquired psychological patterning within each individual. The fallen spiritual condition of mankind precipitates the development of this “flesh” patterning of each person’s desires, creating “fleshly desires” (cf. I Pet. 2:11; II Pet. 2:18) or “desires of the flesh” (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16,24). “Flesh,” used in this sense, has to do with *psychological function* rather than *physiological function*.

It is important to reiterate, “what man *is*, is what he was *created to be*.” Man is a human creature, and will never be more or less than a human creature. Man is not to be faulted for being a human creature, and should never despise his humanness. The humanness of *physiological*, *psychological* and *spiritual function* is just the way that the Creator God created man. Man can only *be* what he *is*, a human creature.

It is regrettable therefore, that many evangelical Christians cast a negative aspersion on man’s humanness, as if there was something sinful about being human. What they fail to realize is that sin has a spiritual source (I John 3:8), and to be a “sinner” is a derived spiritual condition caused by Adam’s act of disobedience (Rom. 5:19). There is nothing wrong with man’s *spiritual function*, only that fallen mankind has the spirit (I Cor. 2:12; Eph. 2:2; I Jn. 4:6) of the Evil One inhabiting and functioning in their spirit. This sinful depravity of man’s spiritual condition must not be projected or transferred into a condition of congenital psychological sinfulness. There is nothing about man’s mind, reason, or intellect that is intrinsically bad, evil, or sinful. God created man, and creates every individual man, with a full set of amoral God-given desires, that are not inherently sinful or evil. There is nothing inherently flawed with man’s decision-making, for man is a choosing creature, just as God created him to be. Christians must beware of negative overtones of implied sinfulness when referring to “human reason,” “human wisdom,” “human desires,” “human affections,” “human decisions,” etc. It must be carefully explained that the sinfulness of fallen man’s spiritual condition has led to the sinful and selfish orientation of unregenerate man’s psychological function. The human creature’s *psychological function* is as God created it to be. And we have just explained above that there is nothing sinful about man’s physicality in his physical body. The *physiological function* of man is intact. Sinfulness is not intrinsic to man’s humanness.

What man *is*, is what he was *created to be*. But what does it take for man *to be* man as God *intended* man *to be*? It takes God in a man for man to be man as God *intended* man *to be*! The Creator God created the creature man to be spiritually indwelt by Himself, God’s Spirit in man’s spirit, still allowing man the freedom of choice to respond to God’s activity in choices of receptivity. That leads us to the next point.

What man *does*, must be *derived* from another.

In the previous study, *Towards a Christian Understanding of God*, it was explained, “God *does* what He *does*, because He *is* Who He *is*.” God acts *by* Himself, *out of* Himself, and *unto* Himself. He is Self-sufficient to Self-generate all of His own activities.

Earlier in this study, we indicated, “what God *does*, man *cannot do*.” God acts *out of Himself*, *ek eautos*, for He is sufficient in Himself to empower and generate that which is consistent with His own absolute Being. This man cannot do, for man is not God, nor a god, and has no intrinsic capability to self-generate character or behavior. Man does not act *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing,” for that is just as absurd and illogical an explanation of man’s action as it is of God’s creation. Neither does man act *ek eautos*, “out of himself,” for he does not have an intrinsic ingenerate resource for such activity. The independent and autonomous Creator God created human creatures whom, *unlike Himself*, are derivative, dependent and contingent.

The prime function of God is *activity* consistent with His own character and Being, whereas the prime function of man is *receptivity* from a spirit source beyond himself. The human creature is a receiver. Derivation and receptivity are the basic response-function of our created humanness.

In new covenant, Christian, terms, *God’s activity* is called *grace*, and *man’s receptivity* is called *faith*. Despite all the static definitions of faith as belief or assent to revelatory data and the doctrines of the church, the dynamic definition that best accords with the scriptural usage is that the faith-responses of the Christian are “man’s receptivity to God’s activity,” or “man’s availability to God’s ability,” or “man’s dependence on God’s deity.” The relationship between God and man is always that of *God’s grace-activity* responded to by *man’s faith-receptivity*. “For by *grace* you have been saved through *faith*...” (Eph. 2:8).

Scripture employs several analogies to illustrate man as a receiver. Each of these provides a slightly different picture of man’s function of receptivity.

Man is referred to as a *vessel*. The Lord told Ananias, for example, that he should go to Saul (who became Paul), “for he is a chosen *vessel* of Mine, to bear My name...” (Acts 9:15). Paul, in turn, told Timothy that a man was to “be a *vessel* for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (II Tim. 2:21). In his letter to the Romans, Paul refers to “*vessels* of wrath” and “*vessels* of mercy” (Rom. 9:22,23), speaking of the Jews and Gentiles respectively. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul tells them, “we have this treasure (the living Lord Jesus) in earthen *vessels*, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves” (II Cor. 4:7). The Greek word for “vessel” (*skeuos*) was used to refer to “*vessels* of the potter” (Rev. 2:27; Rom. 9:21), clay pots that were used as receptacles or containers for liquids and other substances. That the human creature should be such a *vessel* or receptacle is not something that we can argue about. “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker – an earthenware *vessel* among the *vessels* of earth. Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’” (Isa. 45:9). Human beings are *vessels* created to contain God. Granted, we are more than just inanimate and impersonal pots and pans, for in our humanity we have spiritual, psychological and physiological function, but the analogy of *vessels* or receptacles illustrates human receptivity. Norman Grubb wrote these words about man as a *vessel* or container:

“All creatures are on the receiving end of life. It is the one simple faculty all exercise. Man, the crown of creation, is created a recipient. ...Man can freely, intelligently, delightedly *contain* the living God, so that God lives His own divine life out through the living agency and co-operation of a human personality; but the human being never advances one iota beyond being a mere container of God for time and eternity. Never is there, nor will there be, one atom of godliness, wisdom, love, eternal life, divine power which he can call his own, so that he could say “*I am holy, I am wise, I am mighty*. That is the deadly sin of all history – idolatry.”⁴

“The human created personality can only find its meaning, ...when it is immersed in the Divine – His Spirit in our spirit; His mind, will, His feelings expressed through the powers of our soul; His actions through our body. ... The human self is forever a container,...but never the One in Himself.”⁵

Grubb was always careful to point out that “the *container* never becomes the *contents*,” to counter any ideas that man might become God. It might also be observed that religion is always concerned about *changing* the container with external applications, but the “good news” of the gospel is that an *exchange* of spiritual content is available to those receptive to such.

A second analogy of man’s receptivity is found in the reference to man as a *house*. What is a *house*, but a place that receives people? People dwell in *houses*. The personal occupant meant to occupy our human *house* is the God who made us. We were created to be a dwelling place for God, to freely and willingly allow Him to abide in our abode, to be the Master of the *house*. Even though our physical *house* will have to be reconstructed in the heavenly context, the human creature will always serve as a *house* for God’s presence and function. That is what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our *house* is torn down, we have a building from God, a *house* not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Corinthians 5:1).

Similarly, the analogy of man as a *temple* is employed by Paul to illustrate man’s receptivity. What is a *temple*, but a receptacle or dwelling place of a god? Paul questioned the Corinthians, “Do you not know that your body is a *temple* of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (I Corinthians 6:19). “Do you not know that you are a *temple* of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (I Corinthians 3:16). In a subsequent epistle, Paul stated, “We are the *temple* of the living God” (II Corinthians 6:16). Some of these verses are referring to the corporate or collective Church as the *temple* of God, but these do not overshadow the sense of the Christian individual being the human *temple* in which God dwells.

Jesus Himself employed the next analogy of man as a *branch* receiving from the Vine. “I am the Vine, you are the *branches*” (John 15:5), Jesus declared to His disciples. This figure of *branches* elevates the compared subject to that of a living substance, rather than the inanimate and non-living receptacles considered above. The point of Jesus’ metaphor is how the *branches* are receptive to, and must derive from, the Vine (Jesus), in order to bear (not generate, manufacture, or produce) fruit. The contextual references to love (Jn. 15:9,12,13) and joy (Jn. 15:11) seem to evidence that Jesus was referring to the character-fruit of the Spirit that “is love, joy, peace, patience...” (Gal. 5:22), rather than to the “fruit of evangelism” as some have alleged. A major problem in the interpretation of this analogy has arisen when commentators attempt to draw from the picture an explanation of the type of oneness or union that exists between a botanical vine and branches, and then seek to apply their observations of “organic union” or “organic oneness” to the union of Christ and the Christian. This is invalid. The entire context evidences that Jesus was illustrating the receptivity and derivation of the Christian who freely chooses to dependently “abide in Christ,” allowing Him to manifest His character-fruit in Christian behavior.

That the Vine and branch analogy was intended to illustrate the derivational function of the Christian is certainly evidenced in Jesus’ statement, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The theme of this section, “what man *does*, must be *derived from another*,” is clearly addressed for the Christian in this statement of Jesus.

Some have objected by questioning, “Does this mean that a Christian *cannot do anything* apart from Jesus? Can a Christian not make a determinative choice to brush his teeth or tie his

shoe apart from a spiritual impulse from a spirit-source?” We do not want to impinge upon the human ability as a choosing creature to decide and determine to implement an action. Otherwise, man is but an automaton. By explaining that man *derives* what he *does* from another, from a spirit-source of God or Satan, and denying the humanistic premise of intrinsic self-determination and self-sufficiency, we must not lapse into either divine determinism or the obverse of diabolic determinism of all man’s actions. The human creature chooses, self-determinatively, to engage in an action. But every human action is prompted by a motivation, and expressive of character. Though many people do not want to analyze their motivations, and ask “why” they choose to do what they do, there are, nonetheless, conscious or unconscious motivations behind every human choice of action. These motivations can be either selfish or unselfish, for they have a spiritual source in either Satan or God. The human action itself may be amoral, even though religious and secular moralities will always attempt to attribute moral value to the actions themselves. But within every action there will be character expression from one spiritual source or the other – godliness or sinfulness, good or evil, righteousness or unrighteousness, love or selfishness. Man chooses to implement an action, but there will always be spiritual motivations and character expression within the action. So, when Jesus said, “Apart from Me, you can *do nothing*” (John 15:5), He did not mean that man was incapable of making a choice, but rather that *nothing* of God’s motivational prompting or divine character expression would be involved in that chosen action unless the Christian is submitting to Christ’s Lordship, “abiding” in Him, and deriving God’s character expression in the action.

Returning to the analogies of man’s receptivity, Paul often employs the figure of Christ as the *Head*, and Christians as the *Body* of Christ. “He (Christ) is *head* of the *body*, the church” (Col. 1:18). “We are to grow up in all things into Him, who is the *head*, even Christ, from whom the whole *body* is fitted and held together...” (Eph. 4:15,16). Though this metaphor is always used of the collective community of Christians, it still illustrates how Christians derive their direction from Christ in like manner as the human body receives its direction from the head. The human body never acts independently of the head, but always derives its activity from the neurological impulses of the head.

The final analogy to be considered is that of the relationship of *husband* and *wife*. Romans 7:1-6 seems to picture the Christian as a woman who was spiritually married to a satanic husband, but was released from that marriage by death, in order to be joined to Christ as spiritual husband. More explicitly, Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the relationship of *husband* and *wife* (Eph. 5:22-33), and explained that he was “speaking with reference to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32). It has traditionally been recognized that the *woman* is the receiver in the marriage relationship, and the husband has the responsibility to provide loving leadership. Despite any social and cultural gender adjustments, the fact cannot be avoided that the woman is designed for sexual receptivity. The spiritual implication is that all human beings, male and female, are like *wives* joined to a spiritual husband. We are all designed for spiritual receptivity. The oneness of the marital union wherein “the two become one” (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31) is not a merged, absorbed, or monistic oneness, but is a relational oneness that only functions properly when the Trinitarian relationalism of God’s love is operative in the marriage union. Likewise, the union of Christ and the Christian, when we are wed to Christ and “joined to the Lord in one spirit with Him” (I Cor. 6:17), is not a union of absorption, but a relational oneness wherein the Christian is to remain receptive to Christ in all things.

These analogies are all illustrative of man’s spiritual *receptivity*, of how man functions by *derivation* from a spiritual source. When God created Adam, He encouraged him to *receive*, to

“eat freely” (Gen. 2:16) of the “tree of life” (Gen. 2:9), in order to *derive* the outworking of the divinely inbreathed (Gen. 2:7) life of God in man. The serpent, representing Satan (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), the “father of lies” (Jn. 8:44), lied to the original man, telling him that if he were to eat of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9,17) which God had forbidden, he would “be like God” (Gen. 3:5). It was a lie, for only God can be autonomous and independent, Self-empowering and Self-generating His activity out of His own Self-sufficiency. What God *is*, man *cannot be*. What God *does*, man *cannot do*. Man, the human creature, did not have the inherent resource to be independent and self-generative, for the human functions only by dependency and receptivity. The diabolic lie of man’s capability of being an “independent self”, the lie of intrinsic idiopathic human generation, presented Adam, the representative man for humanity, with the choice of functioning as God intended by receptivity from God, or attempting to function in the self-effort of self-sufficiency. The human creature, being a choosing creature with “freedom of choice,” was the only creature that could choose to refuse to function as God intended, by rejecting the presence of God’s life within. But by his rejection, man did not, for he could not, become an autonomous and self-generative being. Fallen man is unaware that he is still deriving what he does from a spiritual source, “the prince of the power of the air, who is working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), because “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving” (II Cor. 4:4). Generation after generation of mankind has touted their innate and intrinsic abilities in the humanistic thesis that they can function independently, as only God can function. Man has pompously assumed that he was his own center of reference, that he can be the cause of his own effects, that he has unlimited potential to achieve whatever he can conceive.

The Christian premise that man derives all that he does from a spirit source beyond himself is not only antithetical to all humanistic thought, but many in the context of Christian religion reject it also. Much of religion emphasizes the performance of “works” for spiritual advancement. Not understanding that God’s prime function is *activity*, while man’s prime function is *receptivity*, they are constantly advocating increased activity for their adherents. The church leaders are repeatedly harping on “getting involved,” on being “committed and dedicated” to churchy busyness that is seldom God’s business. Church attendance, tithing, serving on committees – the incessant calls to “*go, go, go*, and *do, do, do* for Jesus” – are never-ending religious mantras. The popular religion of performance cannot accommodate the activity of God’s grace received by faith.

Some religious teaching can recognize the need to repudiate humanistic thought and the idea that man can be an independent, self-originate or self-generative creature. But they often revert to an equally repugnant idea, that of “contributive man,” and utter such abominable statements as, “God helps those who help themselves,” and “Do your best, and God will do the rest,” often thinking that these are Biblical statements or concepts. If the satanic deceiver cannot get man to believe that he *causes* his own activity, he will at least attempt to get man to believe that he can *contribute* to activity that pleases God.

Popular evangelical teaching often bristles at the idea that man derives his functional expression from a spiritual source in either God or Satan. Evangelicalism gives lip-service to man’s inability to generate his own righteousness, for Paul writes clearly, “if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly” (Gal. 2:21), but in practice they advocate an unending litany of righteousness by performance of ritual, moral conformity, church involvement, etc. It is man’s derivation of *unrighteousness* and sin *from Satan* that evangelical humanism most strenuously objects to. Invariably they argue that this diminishes man’s

responsibility, for they are so concerned with man having to make the choices to act properly. Many evangelicals, especially those who espouse Reformed theology, can accept a divine determinism, but they are afraid that man's derivation from the Evil One creates a diabolic determinism that is akin to the old Flip Wilson comedy routine, "the Devil made me do it!" As indicated earlier, spiritual derivation does not imply *any* form of determinism, for man still has the response-ability and responsible accountability to make choices of receptivity to derive from one spiritual source or the other.

The either/or of spiritual character derivation is very clear in the scriptures. Righteousness is derived *ek theos*, "out of God" by faith (Phil. 3:9). Goodness is derived *ek theos*, "out of God" (III John 11) by one who has "seen God." On the other hand, sin is derived *ek diabolos*, "out of the devil" (I John 3:8). Cain's murder of his brother, Abel, was derived "out of the Evil One" (I John 3:12). The apostle John explains that "the *children of God* and the *children of the devil* are obvious: every one not expressing righteousness is not *ek theos*, "out of God" (I John 3:10).

The British Bible teacher and author, W. Ian Thomas, expresses this dichotomy of derivation from either God or Satan so succinctly.

"As godliness is the direct and exclusive consequence of God's activity, and God's capacity to reproduce *Himself* in you, so all ungodliness is the direct and exclusive consequence of Satan's activity, and of *his* capacity to reproduce *the devil* in you! ...For iniquity is no more the consequence of your capacity to imitate the devil, than godliness is the consequence of your capacity to imitate God!"⁶

Evangelicals, as a whole, are not willing to accept this clear-cut dichotomy of derivation, that "what man *does*, must be *derived* from a spirit-source." Instead, they insist that whenever sinful character is expressed, whether in the unregenerate or in the regenerate, it is generated *ek eautos*, "out of oneself," which effectively makes man a devil. A popular variation of the thesis explains that sinfulness is derived *ek eautos* from an intrinsic straw-man called "self." What is this, but a variation of the humanistic premise that man is an "independent self" that can generate character and activity *ek eautos*, "out of himself" – the very premise that was explicitly denied at the beginning of this section, because God alone Self-generates His character *ek eautos*. If sinful expression is blamed on an alleged independent personal resource called "self," or on some "dirty old man" within, then religion can revert back to the self-effort of performance whereby man attempts to solve his own problems, for his alleged problem is a "self-problem." In evangelical humanism this often takes the form of masochistic attempts to beat oneself into moral conformity, or to psycho-suicidal attempts to "crucify self" or to "die to self." Though we are admonished by Jesus to "deny ourselves" (Luke 9:23), by disallowing self-oriented sinful expression in Christian behavior, this is not equivalent to the encouragement of evangelical humanism to become better Christians by crucifying or suppressing this alleged "self"-resource within that allegedly generates our sinfulness. What a con-game the Evil One has going on as he disguises his sin-activity under the cloak of "self," deceiving man into thinking that man himself is the devil-self who is producing sin, and prompting man to engage in masochistic self-effort to destroy or crucify this "self." Man is thus regarded to be his own devil and his own savior – this is the lie of evangelical humanism!

The derivation of the character expressed in human behavior is either *ek theos* or *ek diabolos*. There is no third option or alternative of derivative source, whether it be called "self," "old self," "sinful self," "natural self," "old nature," "sin-nature," "fallen nature," "carnal man," "carnality," "flesh," etc. This latter term, "flesh," is a Biblical term (*sarx*), and our previous

discussion denied that Paul's usage of the term behaviorally was to be equated with physicality, or with any inherent sinfulness of man's being. It is just as important to point out that the "flesh" is not a generative resource that effects sinful expression in either the Christian or the non-Christian. The "flesh" is Satan's patterning of his character of selfishness and sinfulness upon or within the desires of man's soul. It is not a substantive source of sin, a hidden hunk of evil, or a "dirty old man" within, driving us to dastardly deeds. "Flesh" patterns in the desires of our psyche are individuated tendencies and propensities to act and react in selfish and sinful ways. While the "flesh" is not a self-producing source of sin, it does provide a foothold for satanic temptation to sinful expression, in contrast to the Spirit's impulses to manifest godly behavior in the Christian (Gal. 5:16-25).

It is important to reiterate that the character of man's behavior is not self-generated by anything within man. Man derives what he does from either God or Satan, and that by a choice of receptivity to such character expression. If, as evangelicalism tends to indicate, man can manufacture and produce his own sin and unrighteousness *ek eautos*, "out of himself," then it is logically imperative to likewise indicate that man is capable of generating his own righteousness and holiness *ek eautos*. If man is capable of the one, he is capable of the other. Ponder the logical consequences of such: If man is capable of self-generated *unrighteousness*, he becomes his own devil and is irredeemable. If man is capable of self-generated righteousness, then the incarnation of Jesus was superfluous and "Jesus died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21). If there is any truth in the humanistic premise that man is self-empowering and self-generative, then there is no "good news" of man's redemption – there is no Christian gospel! God forbid!

The repetitive and emphatic explanation of man's inability to be a god-like producer and actuator of behavioral character is necessary to formulate a firm foundation for understanding the gospel. That is why we have belabored the point over and over again in this article. It is only when we understand that "what man *does*, he *derives* from another," from a spirit-source other than himself, that we have a valid Christian premise that denies the humanistic premise *en toto*, and establishes a logical basis for understanding anthropological function.

Who man is, must be derived from another.

The thesis of human derivation must now be applied to "*who man is*," i.e. to his *identity*. The identity of man is not to be found in what man does. What we *do*, does not establish who we *are*, anymore that what God *does* establishes His *Being*. It has been explained above that "what man *does*, he *derives* from another," from a spirit source. Therefore, what we *do*, cannot be the basis of our identity, because it is not we who are doing it. God or Satan is generating the activity of our behavioral character. The spiritual personage who dwells in an individual and actuates his character *in, as, and through* that individual, must be the basis of that individual's identity. "*Who man is, must be derived from another.*"

The fallen world of mankind seems to be on an unending quest for establishing their identity. "Who am I?" "I want to be somebody." The premise of humanism indicates that man must find this identity in himself, for the thesis posits that there is nothing greater than man himself. So man is continually digging into himself to find his identity, and often attempts to establish his identity in one of three ways.

The first approach might be called *identity in something about myself*. Such an identity might be based on one's physical looks. "I am somebody because I have a beautiful body, a pleasing face, a muscular body, an hour-glass figure, etc." Identity might be based on one's

talents and abilities. “I am somebody because I am an athlete, a musician, or have above average intelligence.” Identity might be based on personal accomplishments. “I am somebody because I made the honor roll, because I have been successful in business, because I am a doctor, or lawyer, or am listed in *Who’s Who*.”

A second approach to identity might be called *identity by what we possess*, for it is based on the material things that one possesses. “I am somebody because I wear designer clothing; I drive a luxury car; I live in a million dollar home; I have a financial portfolio that makes me secure.”

Others attempt to establish an *identity by association*. “I am somebody because I belong to this sorority or fraternity; I belong to this club or organization; I serve on this board or committee; I attend this church.”

Basing our identity on such humanistic, materialistic, and socialistic foundations is very precarious. Things about ourselves change with age; and our abilities diminish. Possessions wear out; and the financial resources for acquiring such can recede. Friends are sometimes fickle; and we can be rejected. Do we cease to be *who we are* when these inevitabilities and misfortunes come upon us? It is imperative that we establish an identity that is based on a deeper reality than such surface factors of our abilities, our things, and our associates.

The deepest foundation for identity is *spiritual*. But since there is no intrinsic function or capability in the human spirit, our spiritual identity must be *derived* from another, from a spirit source in either God or Satan. God has a Self-existent identity – He *is* Who He *is*, in Himself. Man has a *derived identity* – derived from the presence of either the “spirit of truth” or the “spirit of error” (I John 4:6) – derived from either the spirit of the god of this world (I Cor. 2:12; II Cor. 4:4) or the Spirit of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:12). Man’s identity will be aligned either with “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), or the Spirit of God that dwells in receptive Christians (Rom. 8:9,11; Gal. 4:6).

The apostle John explained that it was obvious that there are “children of God” and “children of the devil” (I John 3:10). The apostle Paul differentiated between “sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2; 5:6) and “sons of God” (Rom. 8:14) “through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). He also referred to those identified as “slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:6) and “slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18). These identifications are based on an individual’s *spiritual identity* in conjunction with the spirit of God or Satan.

Derived spiritual identity is formulated by the *derived spiritual nature* of a person. Although humanism, at least as far back as Greek philosophy, has posited an inherent “human nature” from which man allegedly derives his behavioral expression, the New Testament explanation is that man is either “by *nature* a child of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), or “a partaker of the *divine nature*” (II Peter 1:4). The *spiritual nature* of a person is *derived* from the *nature* of the spiritual personage that indwells the spirit of that individual, and thus formulates that person’s *derived spiritual identity*. This being the case, it is impossible to legitimately postulate that a Christian has “two natures,” as is so popular in the teaching of evangelical humanism. To claim that a man has both an “old nature” and a “new nature” (neither of which are Biblical terms) is to create a schizophrenic duality of identity that leads to a paranoid uncertainty in behavioral implementation. But evangelical humanism insists on retaining the attribution of an “old nature,” a “sinful human nature,” or a “flesh-nature” because they must find a source for man’s sinfulness, and refuse to accept that the source of sin is *derived out of* the devil (I John 3:10).

The *derived spiritual identity* of the unregenerate is that of a “sinner” (Rom. 5:19) in identification with the spirit from which all sin is derived (I John 3:10). The *derived spiritual identity* of the Christian is that of a “saint” (Rom. 1:7; 8:27), a “holy one,” so identified not by intrinsicity but by the presence of “the Holy One” (Acts 3:14), Jesus Christ, who by His Spirit indwells the spirit of the regenerate (cf. John 3:1-8).

By faith-receptivity of the Spirit of Christ any individual can participate in the spiritual exchange that changes their spiritual identity and makes them a Christian. But “if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9). When the living Lord Jesus enters and occupies our human spirit, “the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). Christ is our life (Col. 3:4), and will actively seek to manifest His life in our behavior (II Cor. 4:10,11). The Christian, the Christ-one, who is “in Christ” has become a “new creature” (II Cor. 5:17), and has the spiritual identity of “a new man” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) in place of their previous spiritual identity as an “old man” (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9).

Christ, who is life (John 14:6), has become “our life” (Col. 3:4) as a Christian, and we can say with Paul, “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20), and “for me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). But this new spiritual identity wherein Christ lives *in* us, and *as* us, and *through* us,⁷ must not be overstated in such a way that it violates the recognition that “what God *is*, only God *is*,” and “man *is not*.” It is always a false claim of identity when a Christian declares, “*I am* God,” or “*I am* Christ,” or “*I am* the Holy Spirit.” Such claims are always blasphemous. Norman Grubb explained, “the essence of idolatry is to claim to be what only God is.”⁸

It is important that the *derived spiritual identity* of the Christian be psychological affirmed in our minds and emotions. We only choose to be receptive to the behavioral expression of Christ’s life *as* us and *through* us, when we have an established attitude, a *positive personal concept*, of *who we are* in Christ. This clear understanding of spiritual identity provides the basis upon which we make the faith-choice to implement behavior wherein *we behave like who we have become*. This is quite different than the attempts of humanistic psychologists to encourage people to develop a mental and emotional sense of “self-esteem,” “self-image,” “self-value,” or “self-worth,” based on something in or about themselves.

When a Christian does not operate out of a *positive personal concept* of who they are in Christ, and reverts back to a false psychological sense of identity, complaining, “But I don’t *feel* like a new man,” “I don’t *feel* like a ‘holy one’,” “I don’t *think* I am a Christian anymore,” they have fallen into Satan’s temptation trap of a psychologically based sense of identity. Satan’s first line of temptation is to cause Christians to doubt that they *really are* who they spiritually *are* in Christ, for he knows that this short-circuits the necessary understanding of spiritual identity whereby Christian behavior is implemented. The question for Christians is: Are we going to believe what God says about our spiritual identity in Christ, or are we going to believe what Satan has introduced into our threatened thoughts and fickle feelings by his temptation? Remember how ten of the twelve Israelite spies allowed the appearances of the occupants of the Promised Land to affect their feelings? They cowardly exclaimed, “We are but grasshoppers in our own sight and in their sight, and are not able to do this thing.” Such a “grasshopper complex” sometimes afflicts Christians when they allow Satan’s temptations to cause them to falsely view themselves as but “worms” or “wretched liabilities” in God’s sight, instead of affirming their spiritual identity in Christ.

When Christians do succumb to temptation and fail to behave like who they have become, this does not affect their spiritual identity. *Christians do sin* and misrepresent who they

are in Christ, but they do not then cease to be who they are. It might be said that such a Christian is “not acting like himself,” or is “acting out of character,” but this does not mean that the Christian loses his spiritual identity (or his salvation). If our spiritual identity was affected by such sinful misrepresentation, then who we *are* would be based on what we *do*, and it is not!

Having considered that man is a human creature who derives *who he is* (identity) and *what he does* (activity) from a spiritual source other than himself, we must proceed to consider the purpose of man’s existence and function.

Why man is what and who he is.

God created mankind for a reason. That reason was not that God was isolated in loneliness, and needed the social fellowship of “someone to hang with.” God’s Triune relationality as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit loving one another from eternity is a complete denial of God’s “need” for sociality. In addition, such a divine “need” (God has no needs) would make God contingent and dependent upon man to be a complete God. Never!

What, then, is the reason why God created man to be *what he is* as a human creature, and recreated the human race through His Son, after the Fall, so the Christian man could be *who he is* spiritually in Christ? As we explained in the previous study of God, “God *does* what He *does*, unto Himself.”

God created all things for His own glory (Ps. 19:1), but humanity’s ability to spiritually derive from God and express the character of God as no other part of the created order can do, evidences that mankind was “*created for His glory*” (Isa. 43:7) in a unique way. The Psalmist explained, “God crowned man with glory and majesty” (Ps. 8:5), and through the prophet, God declares, “They are the work of My hands, that I may be glorified” (Isa. 60:21). Consistent with such Biblical statements, the Westminster Confession states, “the chief end of man is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.”

Since God “does not give His glory to another” (Isa. 42:8; 48:11), His Self-glorification must come via His own Self-expression of His own all-glorious character within the human creature, who was uniquely designed for such by being created with the capacity of spiritual function. When the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, is present and functioning within the spirit of man, then man can fulfill his *raison d’etre* to glorify God, as God’s all-glorious character is derived from God and manifested in human behavior.

The human creature exists to manifest God’s glorious character in human behavior unto the glory of God. That is the reason why man was originally created “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26,27). The “image of God,” the *imago Dei* as it is known in theology, is not something about man that is *like* God. It is not an intrinsic God-likeness created into what man is. So the traditional explanations of “the image of God” as inherent rationality, personality, volition, sociality, communicability, potentiality, etc. like unto God, impinge upon the above stated premise that “what God *is*, only God *is*, and man *is not*.” But, if we understand “the image of God” in man in terms of functionality, rather than in terms of intrinsic constitution, we can further explicate the thesis, “what man *does*, he *derives* from another, from a spirit source other than himself.”

The original words for “image” in both the Hebrew and Greek languages (Hebrew *tselem*, and Greek *eikon*) refer to a visible impression or expression. God is invisible (Rom. 1:20; I Tim. 1:17), and “no man has seen God at any time” (John 1:18; I John 4:12). So the visibility of God’s *image* must come in the functionality of man’s receptivity and derivation of the expression of

God's character in human behavior. The "image of God" is a *derived image*, as man allows for the *visible expression* of the *invisible character* of God in human behavior. For man to bear such an *image* or visage of God requires the presence of God in a man, and the dynamic function of God through the man, thereby allowing for a derived expression of the all-glorious character of God. In the words of W. Ian Thomas, "Man was created in such a way that he could bear the image of God without God becoming visible."⁹ But in the fall of man into sin, that which was "designed by God to bear the divine image, was prostituted by the devil to become the means whereby man could bear the satanic image."¹⁰ Once again, we see that man derives what he does from either God or Satan, and manifests a *derived image* of either the character of God or the character of the Evil One.

Jesus Christ, as "the *image* of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15; II Cor. 4:4), expressed God's all-glorious character perfectly in human behavior for every moment in time for thirty-three years. "The Word became flesh, and we beheld His *glory*, *glory* as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). The Son of God took the death than humanity deserved in order to give mankind His life, and said to God in His prayer, "I *glorified* Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gave Me to do" (John 17:4). In the same prayer Jesus said, "The *glory* which Thou hast given Me, I have given them" (John 17:22). By the presence of the living Christ in us, we have "Christ in us, the hope of *glory*" (Col. 1:27). Christ has "restored us to a true knowledge according to the *image* of the One who created us" (Col. 3:10). God has given us "the light of the knowledge of the *glory* of God, in the face of Christ" (II Cor. 4:6,7). Christians are thereby "predestined to be conformed to the *image* of His Son" (Rom. 8:29), "being transformed into the same *image* from *glory* to *glory*" (II Cor. 3:18).

We must be realistic in recognizing that Christians do not always visibly *image* God perfectly. When Christians sin and misrepresent the character of God, they "come short of the *glory* of God" (Rom. 3:23). But we need not, and should not, wallow in guilt or self-condemnation for such misrepresentation. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). We "confess our sins" (I John 1:9), and proceed to remember that we have "Christ in us, the hope of *glory*" (Col. 1:27).

What a privilege we have as Christians to function as God intended man to function, to be and do whatever God wants to be and do in us, as we live by the indwelling Christ. Christians, unlike the rest of mankind, do not have to keep searching for meaning or significance in life. We have a clearly stated purpose and objective of "*why* man is, *what* and *who* he is." We exist to make visible the invisible and glorious character of God in our human behavior, deriving all that we are and do from Him in the receptivity of faith. The Christian understanding of man is the only anthropological perspective that has an adequate teleology that straightforwardly explains *why* we exist and assures the end-objective of our existence in an eternal destiny.

Conclusion

The Christian understanding of God was given much clarification early in Christian history as the various councils produced statements concerning Christology and the Trinitarian relationality of God. The Christian understanding of man, however, did not receive the same attention and scrutiny. Clear and comprehensive statements of the human creature's constitution and function were not provided in the creedal formulations of the early church. Throughout church history there have been particular systems of thought that have encroached upon a

Christian understanding of man, such as Gnosticism, Pelagianism, Arminianism, etc., but the church's response to them did not produce a comprehensive anthropological understanding.

There is a dire need in our day to explain how the human creature functions – what he *is* and *is not* capable of. The philosophical premises of humanism have become the popular and accepted bases for anthropological understanding in contemporary society. To counter humanistic thought with an antithetical explanation of *derivative man* is to encounter much ridicule and rejection. Since humanism elevates man to a place of ultimate concern and deification, the explanation of man as a dependent, contingent, and derivative creature appears to be a denigration of man that diminishes man's abilities, and projects humanity to be of lesser consequence. To proclaim a Christian understanding of man will be an iconoclastic effort of destroying the false and idolatrous concepts that man is a god unto himself.

The effort to explain that man is only and always a derivative creature is further complicated and countered by the fact that most of Christian teaching has adopted many of the presuppositions of humanism. Many who call themselves "Christians" believe, in one form or another, that man is capable of generating his own character expression – if not by human "works" of performance righteousness, then at least capable and responsible for self-generating his own sin and *unrighteousness*. Accepting the premise of a "self" that operates independently of a spirit source in either God or Satan, such religious teaching is forced into finding a solution to the alleged "self-problem" by encouraging the self-effort of self-suppression or the "crucifying of self." The selfism prevalent in "evangelical humanism" today reacts strongly against the understanding of man as a derivative creature.

The outline for understanding man that we have presented in this article is intended to provide a complete antithesis to humanistic presuppositions of human potentiality, and to reject humanistic philosophy *en toto*. Instead of man having intrinsic self-generative ability, we have explained that man is a derivative creature designed by the Creator to be dependent upon the Creator and receptive to the character expression of the Creator, in order to be the human creature that the Creator intended the creature to be. Thereby, and only thereby, is man fulfilled as man, and God glorified as the God that He is.

Footnotes

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