

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Man as God Created Him/Them

*Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions. (Ecclesiastes 7:29)*

*And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)*

What was the original state of man as God created him/them? I include the plural form of the word because the Genesis narrative, even in the first mention of man's creation, refers to man in the plural.

*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let **them** have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he **them**. And God blessed **them**, and God said unto **them**, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26-28) (The bold "**them**" is my emphasis to illustrate the point.)*

Up to the point of making man (with the likely exception of angels who obviously are created beings) everything that God made related to the inanimate and animal world. With each step of creation as we read the unfolding events in the first chapter of Genesis, God imposed natural laws onto the things that He created. A falling rock cannot defy the law of gravity. A procreating animal cannot violate the law to bring forth of its kind. These laws are fixed by God. The fascinating study of true science goes about discovering all the natural laws that God imposed upon His creation. Is it then any wonder that so many of the pioneers in science were devoted Christians?

Occasionally sincere Christians who struggle with this record will assert that God must have created Adam and Eve with an inherent flaw, that something was wrong with them from the beginning. This assertion however violates the Biblical record of their creation. The proper view

would be to take note of the fact that God created Adam and Eve differently than any other thing that He created, and that He imposed a different kind of law onto them. Yes, He gave them certain natural laws that control their actions; for example, the law of bringing forth after their kind, "Be fruitful and multiply...." He also gave them a different law from the rules imposed on any of His other material creations. He gave them a moral law, and He assigned them personal responsibility and personal accountability to keep the law. He did not impose a divine fiat onto them that they could not violate. He did not ordain and pre-program them to sin based on a secret decree or purpose.

Elder James Oliphant<sup>1</sup> makes this same point.

There is a clear distinction between the laws of God governing [mind], and his laws governing matter. The plants, and, in fact, all matter, are controlled by laws that determine, eternally, the position and course of every atom in creation, but virtue or vice is never attributed to matter. The motion of a wheel may take human life, yet we never think of the wheel as censurable. Mind is governed by moral laws in which government we find virtue and vice, right and wrong, good and evil. God's right to create an intelligent being and place him under law, (moral law) with penalty specified for disobedience and I think ought to be acknowledged. Unless we recognize this as true we make man a mere machine and his actions would have no more vice or virtue in them than the action of an engine or a horse.

To ignore the unique quality of man's creation as a moral, responsible, accountable, and intelligent creature is to ignore one of Scripture's fundamental truths. To acknowledge this truth establishes the

<sup>1</sup> In an article on God's decrees published in *The Pilgrim's Banner* on August 15, 1896.

basis for everything in the Bible that follows the tragic account of man in Genesis the third chapter. It is my personal conviction that these traits of moral, responsible, accountable, and intelligent abilities offer a far more precise description of man created in the image and likeness of God than any other features that we might consider. All of these traits as they appear in Adam prior to his sin affirm Solomon's point; God made man "upright." Notice the significance of this word.

Ethically. Uprightness as the manner of life is a characteristic of the blameless (Prov 11:5) and of the man of discernment (Ps 119:128, "I have lived uprightly"). Thus the fact that God has made man upright (Eccl 7:29) is probably to be interpreted as granting him the ability to recognize the divine law, rather than some inborn character as honest or straightforward (so NEB). It is said of the reckless that his soul is not upright within him (Hab 2:4) and this leads to pride and failure.<sup>2</sup>

God did not make man with a design flaw that appeared when the serpent enticed him and Eve. Nor did God create man under a robotic decree that made man as certain to break the law as for the moon to orbit the earth through its cycles. God invested a unique quality of Himself into only one of His creations, humanity, and that quality most likely refers far more to the moral qualities listed above than to any other possible feature.

Do not miss the closing point of the above citation. The divine design of man, "good," emphasizes man's reliance on the divine law, not on any "...inborn character...." Man's rebellious condition leaves him with a nagging and never-satisfied urge to "do his own thing," but such a self-directing course violates even natural man's created design. If God didn't design His natural creation of man to be self-directed according to "inborn character" traits, why is it that professing Christians so often decide to ignore the Bible and merely "follow my heart"? When they so follow their own internal moral compass, they inevitably develop an incredibly self-serving and selfish course that destroys their Christian witness, as well as their Christian joy in obeying God and serving others.

Scripture speaks of angels that sinned and faced similar divine judgment for their moral breach, it does not go into the same detailed

dialogue regarding them as in the case of humanity. Given this point in Scripture, we may reasonably conclude that God's law to angels was in some way similar to His law to man. That is that He gave them a moral law with both responsibility and accountability to keep it. When they failed to keep it, they fell under divine judgment for their sin. In the discussion of moral qualities I believe angels share in this unique trait, but for sake of focus I will set them aside and explore the Biblical description of man as created uniquely in God's image.

Only man appears in the creation account with the unique feature of being created in God's image and after His likeness. Even angels are not so described in Scripture. What features in man can we identify that distinguish humanity from any other being in nature? What features can we define that affirm man's being created in the divine image and likeness? Some commentators draw the parallel of the Trinity in the being of God with the trichotomy (the three essential components) in man, body, soul, and spirit. This idea offers a possibility, but I fear that it stops short of the profound likeness that Scripture has in mind here. In the Ecclesiastes passage Solomon refers to man being created "upright" before complaining of his descent into a state of malcontented and self-destructive—indeed, self-mutilating—creativity. Man's self-chosen course appears in vivid contrast with God's original creation. "...and, behold, it was very good." The Hebrew word translated "good" in this chapter conveys both a quality of value and a sense of esthetic and moral beauty. Man's choice set him on a course diametrically opposite to God's creation purpose. For that reason it is altogether fitting to describe man's sinful choice as the ultimate act of self-mutilation as well as self-destruction.

We cannot grasp the idea of a human being created in moral perfection—a perfection that grows out of a pristine created nature that has not been compromised or flawed. Nor can we imagine a world in which the dreadful ugliness of sin is altogether absent. However, we should understand clearly that such was the precise case of man's original state as God created him and intended for him to live. God was responsible for that state of man; God is not responsible for the sinful, depraved state of man since his self-mutilating act of rebellion from his Creator. Man alone bears that weight of responsibility. Man's moral and aesthetic beauty as God created him escapes our grasp unless we look to Scripture alone for our answers. We cannot imagine the incredible world that would have existed had Adam and Eve simply obeyed that one rule that God gave them.

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<sup>2</sup>R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980), 417.

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Worship service each Sunday      10:30 A. M.  
Joseph R. Holder                      Pastor