

Psalm 8:1-9, 139:13-16. Fearfully & Wonderfully Made

It is probably safe to say that we live in a world that is characterized by injustice. As the prince of this world, satan enjoys a form of power that lacks any nuance of authority as people reject the word of God and live lives that unwittingly serve the evil one. All the acts of sin in this world are harbored and expressed in the hearts of mankind, and it is employed in the ways they interact with one another. There is one common thread that is woven among the long list of relational sins that are common to man, and that thread is the lack of value that people place in one another, an attitude that results in a culture of racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. The culture contends against the poor, the unborn, the aged, and the infirmed with little or no concern about life's value.

Sin has formed a people who place value on one another based upon their own set of criteria. Religious zealots despise those who do not agree with their narrow and well-defined world view. People who differ in appearance, most notably those of differing skin color, often despise one another. Some despise those who are not as productive in society. In general, those who are helpless to defend themselves are the most despised of all. It seems as though everyone has a set of self-serving definitions that serve to insulate them from others, freeing them to receive some self-gratification by convincing themselves of the lie that they are better than everyone else. These forms of hatred and bigotry, all of them forged in the flames of ignorance, form the basis for virtually every act of violence and injustice in our world.

However, there is a real hope for all of us, a hope that comes from an understanding of the true nature of man, not a nature defined by bigoted and hateful society, but by that nature described by man's creator, God Himself. Satan would have us believe that, as individuals, we are without value, and to satan we are of no value, except to any extent that he can use us to find gain in his rebellious purposes. However, ignorant of our true value, we believe satan's lies. To compensate for those lies, we go to every effort to establish some form of self-worth, usually by conforming ourselves to some image that we see in this worldly society, a conformation to an image that falls far short of what we really are. We attempt to conform to some world standard, placing ourselves in a spectrum of society from its lowest to its highest esteem, constantly looking up and down the spectrum in order to understand who we are. We despise those in the spectrum below us, and revere those in the spectrum who are above us. We strive to move up the ladder as we step over others to get there.

However, Christians are held to a distinct standard that is quite different from that of the world. Rather than be swept back and forth by every wave of satan's hand and every wind of worldly doctrine, Christians are to take a stand. In the 6th chapter of the book of Ephesians, Paul uses the familiar metaphor of the armor of God that Christians are to put on to provide the resources needed to take a stand against this world of wickedness. These resources include truth, salvation, faith, righteousness, the gospel, the word of God, and prayer. Christians are called to live lives that are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit of God, so our responses to this world and to each other should be those of kindness, gentleness, patience, love, joy, peace, humility, self-control. It is through this Spirit-filled world-view that Christians can see their world through God's viewpoint, and when we do, we come away with a quite different picture of the state of the value of man. We also come away with a completely different viewpoint of our own individual value, and the value of every other soul to whom God has given life.

1. THE VALUE OF MAN

Psalm 8:1-4. *O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. ²Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. ³When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; ⁴What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

Unlike those in the world who reject God, those who place their faith and trust in God live their lives out in His presence, on the Altar of God's throne. The different standard of conduct that is expected of Christians may be empowered by the spiritual armor and applied in spiritual fruits, but the motivation for that behavior comes from a love and appreciation for God, for who He is, and for what He has done for us. When our world view is no longer focused on our own little world and shifts to the throne of God, everything changes. We find the capacity for true love, peace, and joy as the world view of selfishness that leads to injustice is replaced by God's view of relationships that lead to edification and love.

As David writes this song of prayer and praise to the LORD, he is experiencing what we may call a theophany: a moment of sharp realization of who God is and what the impact of that knowledge has on our life. David sees the vastness of creation, a vastness that to him is even tiny compared with today's knowledge of the nature of the universe. David compares himself, a single man, to this vast

universe that God created for His own pleasure and comes away with a simple thought: as infinite as God is, and as inconceivable as His creation is, why would God consider the state of man, or even the state of a single person? Why would the God of the universe think that you are personally of so much value that He would come from his position in the eternal heaven and visit with us, performing the act of atonement that He did on the Cross of Calvary? When man thinks so little of one another, and even less of Him, why does God consider us in the way that He does?

The answer to that question is also the answer to those who find themselves wrestling with the sin of low self-esteem and a disrespect of others. Who is man? Is he just an animal with more intelligence than others? Is he a meaningless mammal whose life begins at birth and ends at death, whose value is determined by their usefulness to others? What makes man different from the other animals on this earth? What makes each person so special that God would love each and every individual, caring for every facet of their lives, down to the knowledge of the number of hairs on their head? The answer is found in God's opinion of man, a created being that is different from all others in the universe.

Psalm 8:5. *For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.*

When God created man, He did something that was different from every other act of creation. God created the universe and its creatures by “speaking” them into existence. That is, they were created by a simple act of His will. However, we find God's creation of man to be done a little differently.

Genesis 2:7. *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

God did three things differently when He created man.

- First, God did not simply speak. God formed man like a potter who shapes the clay with his hands. The metaphor shows the careful and deliberate manner in which God shaped the form of mankind, and like the potter who shapes objects that have a purpose, God shapes each person for a purpose, and coming from God, that purpose is sacred.
- Second, God breathed into mankind the breath of life. Unlike every other animal in God's creation, God breathed into mankind an eternal spirit. God is eternal, and God is Spirit. In this manner, God created mankind with a unique nature that allows each person to have a living relationship with

God whose spirit nature we share. No other animal has this spirit nature. No other animal has this special form of life.

- Third, by giving each person an eternal spirit, every person has a spiritual life, a definition of the soul that is eternal. Every person is a sacred, living soul.
- *A little lower than the angels.* This Hebrew idiom has been the object of much debate over the years, but when we look at the New Testament book of Hebrews, we find that Jesus is also described as a little lower than the angels while He is here on earth.¹ The word “lower” is not referring to a position of value. It is referring to position in reference to eternity. Everything in this universe is carnal and has no spiritual value except for man. It is the spirit in man that (1) differentiates him from the rest of the universe and (2) makes him of more value than the entire carnal universe that will someday be destroyed. While we are in this carnal state, we still hold all of our spiritual value, but are currently “lower” than the level of heaven because of it. When the faithful die, they will be freed from this “lower” finite state and be glorified into their heavenly infinite state. Just as Jesus held all of His spiritual “value” while on earth, every faithful Christian shares that same infinite spiritual value while on earth.

When God created man in this manner, He lifted man above His creation into a position of glory and honor, because the spirit that is given to mankind is the Spirit of God, Himself. Because God created man with an indwelling of His Spirit, man himself is sacred as God is sacred. Just as the value of God is immeasurable, the value of each individual person is immeasurable. One cannot compare the value of a single human to the value of a plant, an animal, or even the whole universe itself.

That spirit is so much a part of our nature that no person is unaware of God's presence, though many are in a state of self-centered rebellion against Him. God created man as the very height of creation giving to him a position that is only slightly lower than His own, lower not by value, but by our created carnal state that defines us prior to our own glorification. He gave to man an intelligence and wisdom that allows him to know the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. With that knowledge, God gave man a dominion and power over all of the creatures in God's cosmos.

Psalm 8:6-9. *Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: ⁷All sheep and*

¹ Hebrews 2:7.

oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; ⁸The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. ⁹O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Though some animals do have the capacity to reason and make rational decisions, none have the ability to commune with God. God created every person with the unique capacity for a relationship with Him. God gave to mankind a stewardship over all of the remainder of God's creation, again identifying the high regard that God has for the people he created. We have been given the earth to cultivate and nurture so that our needs as a growing population can be met. Only when sin enters the picture does the beauty of this plan break down.

2. THE VALUE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

God holds every individual person who He has created in the highest possible regard. Every individual person holds a sacred and immeasurable value.

Psalm 139:13-14. *For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.*

In this song of praise, David also expresses a theophany, but this time rather than considering the value of created mankind, David is amazed as he comes to understand the immense value of the individual. Have you ever given much thought as to the amazing complexity of the human body? Often the birth of a first child reminds a parent of the profound miracle of life. The faithless would argue that there is no God, and we are formed from some random collision of primordial molecules. Such an ignorant position is overwhelmed by, not only God's Word, but by the indescribable evidence that our own bodies present.

The complexity of the body is far beyond that which any human mind can comprehend. We have come to understand some of its properties and systems, but are clueless about the bulk of its complexities and have no understanding of the concept of life itself or the properties of that life that enable sentient thought and decision making. David surrenders his understanding to the famous statement that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." What God has done in forming us is magnificent by any measure of man. You are a magnificent creation of God. Your creation, from the moment of conception, employed all of the creative wisdom and power of God.

Psalm 139:15-16. *My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. ¹⁶ Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.*

There has recently been a lot of debate over where in the sequence of prenatal development the value of an individual is first recognized. There is no such debate in God's Word. David understands that God formed him in the womb, and even though the unborn body is not completely developed, God has already been able to establish a plan for that person. The biblical position of the value of a created individual is clear: life begins at conception.

The scientific position also agrees. Once genetic material combines at conception, all that is needed for an individual to grow and live a full life is nutrition.

3. HELD TO A DIFFERENT STANDARD

How does such an understanding of the sanctity of life impact the way that we think of one another? Living in the Spirit of Christ necessitates that we accept one another in love as God accepts us, unconditionally and without prejudice. God loves us and immensely values us just the way we are: the pinnacle of His creating power. We see this same attitude in the mind of Christ as He demonstrated unconditional love to everyone without regard to their position on any social spectrum. Christians are called to this same standard of unlimited and unconditional love. How does this standard inform the Christian's viewpoints concerning the injustices of this wicked world? When we accept for ourselves the infinite value of every single individual and learn to accept others as God does with His unconditional love, we will respond to others in an entirely different way.

Racism. One of the most grievous sins that Christians refuse to repent of is that of an attitude of racism. Like the rest of the ungodly world, Christians often rationalize the devaluation of others based upon racial criteria. Race is only a matter of personal physical appearance, an appearance that was created by God for His own pleasure. There is absolutely no place for racial injustice in the heart of a Christian. Christians can take a stand against racism by first overcoming their own as they learn to love all people unconditionally and learn to value others as God does. It is the spirit of the individual that makes them sacred, making any physical characteristics of an individual irrelevant. The Spirit of Christ does not differentiate among people by physical appearance.

Greed and Selfishness. People injure, maim, and kill one another over their lust for material possessions. This injustice is simply another example of how people devalue others. An object becomes more valuable than a person. Christians can take a stand against greed by first overcoming their own as they learn to love all people unconditionally and learn to value others as God does. The spirit of Christ is generous, and never holds the value of any earthly object greater than that of an individual.

Gluttony, Vice, and Sexual Immorality. People engage in every form of immoral action and attitude for the purpose of appeasing their own sinful natures. The Spirit of Christ stands above vice and immorality, characterized in a life of purity. Because of the presence of God's spirit, the physical body is the temple, or tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. We take the Spirit of Christ with us every we go, and engage Him in everything we do. We would be less likely to abuse our own body when we really understand that it belongs to God.

The Widowed, the Orphaned, the Homeless, the Abused, and the Needy. People tend to be so self-centered that they have no concern for those around them who are more in need of the basic elements of life. They often despise those who they think of as less fortunate, rationalizing that other's depressed state is deserved or somehow warranted. The Spirit of Christ is a spirit of love that sincerely cares for the needs of others. The Spirit of Christ seeks to demonstrate that love by taking advantage of every opportunity to express that love to those in need and seeking to meet those needs whenever practicable.

The Aged and Infirm. One of the first casualties of a culture that has been decimated by ungodliness is the family. We experience within the context of the nuclear family each of the phases of life from birth through adulthood and eventual death. Parents are responsible for the nurture and care of their young children, just as adult children are responsible for the nurture and care of their aged parents and siblings. The Spirit of Christ recognizes the value and dignity of each individual and seeks to protect and promote the dignity of those who have become defenseless against age and infirmity.

The Unborn. Certainly, the most defenseless of God's people is the unborn child. The biblical and scientific pattern clearly holds that created life begins at conception, and yet those who despise the value of life work hard to create an argument that life begins later so that they can dispose of that which they despise. We decry the child sacrifices of pagan religions, yet even Christians are not insulated from the ravages of one of satan's most effective means of killing souls. As Christians, we must take a stand for the unborn, protecting them from this form of socially normalized genocide, and at the same time stand on God's

promises of forgiveness for ourselves and others who have fallen victim to this grievous of sins fueled by one of satan's many convincing lies.

One Another. Jesus said that Christians would be best known and recognized because of their love, one for another. The command that Jesus give to His disciples to love one another is clear and often stated.² Yet, when we forget the power that satan has to disrupt our lives, we submit to him, and begin to despise one another through self-centered and prideful acts of arrogance as we criticize and snipe one another, vying for the promotion of our own will and self-determination over that of others. We fuss with one another, and we get hurt. The Spirit of Christ is one of love and reconciliation that always seeks to serve one another and meet one another's needs.

These are all examples of ways that sin enters the lives of God's people and then serves to drive them apart by replacing the love that God intended for us to share with Him and one another. God teaches us to love. He teaches us to hold one another in the same esteem that He holds us, an esteem that is so great that God himself seeks a personal relationship with each person. Consequently, each person has an intrinsic value and dignity that is beyond anything we can imagine. Only satan teaches us to hate, despise, and devalue one another. Why would we surrender to such error?

"In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death."³

² John 13:34, 15:12, 15:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:9, et. al.)

³ *Baptist Faith and Message*

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