

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 14/1/'18) **WHO AM I?**

Introduction Who am I? Not, that is, myself as an individual, but myself as a human being. What does it mean to be human? This might seem to be an easy question. After all, each one of us might claim to be an expert; each one of us has first-hand experience of being human. But this has led to a bewildering diversity of ideas. Here is a sampling from a dictionary of quotations. Incidentally, all of them predate thoughtfulness about gender inclusive language, so the word “man” is consistently used to refer to human beings in general. **Aristotle** – “Man is by nature a political animal.” **Edmund Burke** – “Man is by his constitution a religious animal.” **Spinoza** – “Man is a social animal.” **Benjamin Franklin** – “Man is a tool-making animal.” **Charles Lamb** – “Man is a gambling animal.” **Protagoras** - “Man is the measure of all things.” **W.S.Gilbert** - “Man is Nature’s sole mistake.”

This morning, however, we are interested specifically in the Christian understanding of the human person. So does this help? Somewhat, I think. But Christians often disagree also. Personally I would want to say that the truly Christian view of humanness, the biblical view, includes both sinfulness and having been created in the image of God. But I also believe that the second of these is properly the first. I believe that we should begin where the Bible begins, and recognise that sinfulness is not part of the definition of being human. Rather it is a diagnosis of what is wrong with us, a definition of the distortion of true humanness that came later than Creation, and which God is in the process of putting right.

In God’s Image

The first statement of the Bible about being human is contained in its first chapter, as part of the story of Creation. **Read Genesis 1:26-28.** But what does it mean to have been made in the image of God. Biblical scholars and theologians have made many suggestions, some of them perceptive and helpful. For example, two of the best suggestions: that it is about authority, about God-given dominion in the world; and that it is about creativity, about sharing in some measure God’s capacity to create things. But I doubt whether even these good suggestions get to the heart of the matter. I doubt whether the words “let us make human beings in our image” are given to us as a riddle to be solved. Rather, I believe that the biblical affirmation of our having been made in God’s image is a great, although mysterious, word of grace and encouragement. We are meant, I believe, to accept it with wonder and deep gratitude, without being able to explain it thoroughly. God is telling us that we as human beings have a deep affinity with him which no other creature has, and therefore a God-

given capacity for conscious fellowship with God! This has two very important consequences for how we should think about being human. First, it means that I must never dismiss any person as contemptible or insignificant, whether myself or someone else. To do so is to insult the God who created human beings, *all* human beings, in his own image.

Secondly, it means that I can find fulfilment as a human being only in fellowship with the God who made me in his image. To borrow the beautiful words which Augustine addressed to God: “You made us for yourself, and our heart is restless, until it finds its rest in you.”

God’s Image Blurred By Sin We also can never think rightly about ourselves or about other people without remembering that we all alike are sinners. We have to keep in mind Genesis 3 as well as Genesis 1. We have to keep in mind the fact that since Adam and Eve sinned, no human being except Jesus has been free of sin. In Paul’s words, in Romans 3:23, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Therefore no one can come to God other than as a sinner. Jesus made this point very clearly in his story about two men praying in the temple. (Luke 18:9-14). We need to recognise this, but not allow it to obscure the prior truth of having been made in God’s image. It has sometimes been argued that sin obliterates the image of God in human beings. But I would say rather that it blurs it, or mars it. It seems to me that the Bible makes it clear within the Flood narrative that sinful human beings are still to be seen as in God’s image – ***read Genesis 9:6***. The human person is neither pure sin nor pure image. To be human is to be stretched between these opposing realities, between our likeness to God and our rebellion against God. And this paradox would be the last word about human beings if it were not for Jesus!

The Image Restored The Writer to the Hebrews provides us with a pointer to the difference made by Jesus in his reflection on Psalm 8. ***Read Hebrews 2:6-9***. Jesus has transformed what it means to be human, in several ways: Jesus has demonstrated that being sinful is not an essential part of being human, and shown us a human life lived in perfect obedience toward God; Jesus has offered forgiveness and new life to all human beings who are willing to trust him; Jesus has provided the power of his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to make it possible for those who trust him to begin to be like him; Jesus has assured us by his rising from the dead, by his victory over death, that one day all those who trust him will enjoy perfect victory, perfect fullness of life, perfect fellowship with God

Conclusion Who am I? As a human being, I am God’s creature, made in God’s image. And I am assured by God’s own word that I am significant in his eyes. I am also a sinner, a creature in whom God’s image has been blurred by the dirty brush marks of selfishness and the breaking of God’s

law. But if I am a Christian I am a *forgiven sinner*, a creature in whom God's image is being restored by the Master Artist himself. And I know what I shall eventually be like. In the words of 1 John 3:2, "I know that when Jesus Christ appears, I shall be like him, for I shall see him as he is." As a Christian, I am someone made significant twice over by the grace of God. First God made me in his image. Then, when I distorted that image by my sin, God loved me so much that he gave his own Son to bring me back to him! Every day I should feel like the Prodigal Son at the feast provided by his father. Isn't it wonderful to have such a Father, to owe my existence to someone like this? But isn't it terrible that I should ever have sinned against this Father? Yet isn't it wonderful above all things that my Father never gave up on me, but found a way to bring me back to himself?