

Defining the Gospel - The Real Nature of Men and Women

Anthropology

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III

WHAT do you believe concerning the nature of people? The varying beliefs regarding the character of men and women are a cause of much dissension. How often do we hear a governor or president claim, "I believe in the basic goodness of the American people". Many view people as essentially good. Any suggestion to the contrary offends greatly. Does it matter what you think?

A large number of positive changes that have occurred in the last 150 years have made life so much easier. Many of the innovations are outcomes of good science and technology. We live in homes that are climate-controlled, comfortable and lighted at the touch of a switch or the sound of a voice. We have hot and cold running water and kitchens with every kind of convenience. Travel and communications have never been so expedient and comfortable. In addition our health care has dramatically improved the longevity and

quality of life. It seems reasonable to say that people are basically good and getting better, able to improve their world.

Yet we do need to ask a question. If people are basically good why carry all the keys and ask for security codes and pin numbers? What need is there for safe deposit boxes? Why all the laws backed up with a complex judicial system that includes police and prisons?

Perhaps such systems are insurance for the rare exception? Or are these reminders revealing an undeniable reality? In the first century the apostle Paul defines the biblical view of the nature of people. Was it true then? Is it a legitimate description for the citizens of the world today?

To the Christians in Rome Paul states....

Romans 1

“18The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

21For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

24Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual

impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

26Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

28Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

Paul is concerned here with making these distant friends aware of the state from which they had been spiritually liberated. What he speaks of applies to the nature of all the past, present, and future earth citizens.

God Denied

By nature people deny God's existence. The thinking of the world's citizens is anchored in the absence of knowing God.

Often you will hear people say that acknowledging God is a matter of faith: You either believe or you do not. You cannot know for sure that God exists, or that He does not exist. There is no proof.

God sees it all from a very different perspective as Paul explains in verses 18-20. God has made His existence plain. Much may be known about God. We can know of His eternal power and divine nature. These are both seen through His creation, as displayed within the heavens and earth. To create a world so massive, and yet filled with such details, stuns the mind. By observation with instruments we are able to see the macro- and microscopic details of life that reveals an atom, a cell, the DNA code, or the billions of stars in the universe.

If you were walking along the street and passed by a home that was furnished and inhabited, would you have any doubt that a person or persons existed who created it? In fact, to think otherwise would be preposterous. It did not just appear out of thin air. The evidence is much too strong that some person or persons designed and built it even though they may not be readily identifiable.

And yet, even though it is obvious to a person of faith that a personal and sovereign God exists, and by His power designed and created the earth, to the citizen of the world it makes no sense. Why? Because by nature they must suppress truth. Reality is only partially embraced, and, thus, distorted. What surfaces is a lie that is held and confirmed as authentic. This world citizen concludes that reality is only what can be experienced in a sensual manner. Nothing else can be confirmed. Faith is not acceptable. The result is that it is impossible to acknowledge God.

God Replacement

The nature of the world's citizen is to substitute something for God.

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25They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.”

Part of the nature of the world's citizens is to look beyond self for meaning and life. We are not complete by ourselves. It is believed by many that completion is promised in marriage, the right job, a promotion, the right house and/or car. Possessions, positions, places and people are often what we look toward to obtain the good life. Like it or not, many believe that one or more of those is the key to happiness. But, once obtained, it's only a moment before we need something else to give us our fix. It is an endless cycle that never satisfies.

Some believe that the source of happiness and life can be found under a specific form of government. Bad and incompetent governance can certainly create all sorts of problems, resulting in a miserable existence; yet, no government can take the place of God.

British Historian, Paul Johnson says this:

“But whereas at the time of the Versailles Treaty in 1919, most intelligent people believed that an enlarged state could

increase the sum total of human happiness, by the 1990's this view was held by no one outside a small, diminishing and dispirited band of zealots, most of them academics. The experiment had been tried in innumerable ways; and it had failed in nearly all of them. The state had proved itself an insatiable spender, and unrivalled waster.” (*Modern Times* p. 783)

Specific Behavior

The nature of world citizens is characterized by specific forms of behavior.

What a person really believes will impact the way s/he lives. People are generally practical. A stranger may want to take your car but not be willing to suffer the potential consequences. But there are some who do not mind taking the chance of being caught. For some there are no deterrents that will work, with the exception of some form of physical restraint.

The apostle Paul is very specific in describing the behavior of the world's citizenry. He begins with sexual orientation. According to the creation mandate, a man and a woman will be attractive to one another and pursue marriage. Yet this norm has been abandoned by those whose desires burn for another of the same gender. Men sexually pursue other men, and women desire other women. Paul speaks of this as perversion (v27). He then goes on and addresses the outcome of denying God. He says the citizens are filled with discontentment, the desire to take the life of others, malice, friction, and deception. They speak about others with evil intent. They have no respect for God, who they will not acknowledge. Further, they think highly of themselves and believe that others should acknowledge them; they are known for their arrogance and haughtiness. In the family context, there is no respect and honor for

parents. There is nothing about God's standard that is acceptable.

“32Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

Clearly people are not as bad as they could be; and yet, their thinking and behavior causes them to fall far short of God's will. The result, according to Romans, is God's wrath. We have all fallen short of His perfect will.

The citizens of the world will deny the existence and power of God. They will try to fill the void that is left with something else, and think and act in ways that are contrary to God's standards.

Paul writes not to cause despair, but to help us understand the need for the gospel. There is not hope in ourselves. Our hope is in Christ. This is what John the Baptist (or some think that he may have been Presbyterian...) said when seeing Jesus from a distance.

“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”(John 1:29).

-Reflections-

As you reflect on this portion of the study of the gospel as it pertains to anthropology (theology dealing with the origin, nature, and destiny of human beings, especially as it relates to the nature of God), consider the following questions.

1. What do you consider to be the prevalent view of humn, man nature today? Does the view of those in the West vary from those in the East? What is the basis for such a worldview?

2. Is the nature of adults different from that of children?

3. Do the natures of men and women vary depending upon their ethnic background?

4. What view, if any, of the human nature, does the media hold?

5. Are what people profess they believe about the nature of human beings and what they actually believe the same?

6. Have you ever changed your view pertaining to the nature of people?