



Introduction

God the Creator has gifted humanity with all the gifts necessary for the sustenance of life. Humanity's creativity is a gift beyond human power and imagination. Imagine all the human inventions that have sustained human life since creation. Like God Himself, humanity is by default a natural creator, but nothing created by human beings lasts forever. Now and again houses need renovation, cars need an engine change and servicing, and roads need constant renewal. All these creations break down and need constant maintenance because they are exposed to both natural and unnatural forces that wear them down. So is the heart of human beings. Exposed to spiritual elements against human life, human bodies and minds also undergo perennial infections of the heart leading to impurity, self-damage and causing harm to others.

It is no wonder that our world is so messed up with so much injustice, violence, hatred and conflicts. All these emanate from the untamed desires of the heart. These untamed desires of the heart brew the spirit of competition, conflict, greed and the desire to eliminate those who stand against our ungodly desires. Unless the heart has been renewed by the Creator Himself, no amount of medicine, court processes or democracy can heal the wild and

unruly heart. This heart-change handbook is a series of biblical lessons and applications intended to encourage former substance abusers and all sinners to realise that ultimate freedom from the slavery of addiction and sinfulness lies not in external help like medicines but healing starts with personal heart change effected by the power of the Spirit of God. The series emphasises that the heart is at the centre of human lives and needs to be guarded.

LESSON 1

Humankind as the Image of God

Introduction

Discussion 1: Who am I?

- Q1. How would you respond to the question, “Who are you?”
- Q2. The last seven verses of Genesis 1 describe what God created on the last day of creation. This includes animals and Mankind.
- a. In what ways are animals creatively similar to people?
 - b. In what ways are animals different from people?
 - c. Some of you are here because you say you want to change. What is it that you want to change and what do you want to be after changing?

Self-understanding is central to change. In my interaction with addicts and recovering addicts, a statement I commonly hear is, “Pastor, I want to change”. To me, this communicates somebody’s realisation that something is not right with their way of life. They feel like they need to change their worldview and the way they live their lives. Central to a solution to this life

dilemma is the understanding of the question, “Who am I?” All sorts of descriptions will constitute an answer to this question most probably centred on biological family relationships, ethnicity and race. This lesson will focus on answering this question from the biblical sense of who we are as human beings in the eyes of God.

The image of God (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7; 3:4-5)

The image of God (Genesis 1:26-28)

An image is a picture. Verses 26 and 27 say all humankind, male and female were created in the ‘picture’ of God. But we know that God is Spirit, He has no physical body like people and animals. The big question is, “In what way then were human beings created similar to God?” Genesis 2:7 explains this puzzle. The physical body of a human being was created from the soil of the earth. This human body was just a statue until God breathed the breath of life into the statue’s nostrils. Only then did the man become a living being. It is evident that God’s image in human beings has nothing to do with race, ethnicity, tribe, economic and social status or physical attractiveness. It is a spiritual image, i.e., the breath of God in us – His Spirit. We are all one image before God and all equal before Him. God’s purpose in creating humans in His image was that they would live under His righteous rule in perfect joy, worshipping and obeying Him and living in fellowship with Him to declare His glory to the world.

Spiritual image and its implications (Genesis 2:7)

The breath of God in every human being distinguishes us from all other created animals with whom we share a lot of physical characteristics. We share characteristics with other animals like the ability to walk, sleep, eat, reproduce, fight, etc., but we

remain different from them. Because we are connected to God spiritually as human beings we can have fellowship with God. We share His unique qualities like His love, mercy, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience and love for justice. Because we share these attributes with God, God calls us to duplicate and demonstrate these attributes as His representatives in this world. As humans, we are so close to God that the relationship is of a Father to His children. Like God, we too are creators, rational thinkers with a capacity for judgement and decision-making. Every human being should therefore strive for the desire of God's image which gives us wholeness and completeness. This is the perfect image of God that he designed us to be and represent Him in this world. As His representative on earth, God also calls us to care for His creation (Genesis 1:28).

Discussion 2: Representing God on earth as His image

- Q1. Since God created humans as one image and all equal and valuable before Him, how should we be treating other people?
- Q2. How should we regard racism, ethnicity and tribalism?

A distorted image (Genesis 3:4-5)

The question we need to ask ourselves in the light of us being the image of God is, "How do I measure up to the image of God? Does my present life perfectly represent God in this world or am I now a distorted image of God? The truth is that because of sin we now have a distorted image of God. Sin came to us as a result of the abuse of the free will that God gave to our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were lured into rebelling against God by the crafty serpent (Satan) who questioned God's intentions and made them see God their Creator in a bad light. They were

tricked into thinking that by disobeying God and listening to the advice of the serpent they could be like God Himself, forgetting that they were already God's image. All our sinfulness that has made us dislike who we are is the result of rebellion against God.

Discussion 3: Reality of our distorted image

Q1. Reflect on Romans 3:23 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-12.

Acknowledging the image of God is the foundation of change

God created us to be like Him and loved us so much that, despite our rebellion, He gave us a way of having our tainted image washed to restore the original image. None of our human efforts could appease God's anger at our rebellion. Only the blood of His Son could do that. Acknowledging that we are God's image changes our worldview and how we see others. If we acknowledge that all people are the image of God, it helps us shun favouritism, discrimination and prejudice against others. Even the addict still has to be honoured as an image of God and treated the same as other people. Addiction does not make them sub-human. Even though they struggle with addiction they still can know God and have fellowship with Him. It is important to note that even for addicts who are the image of God, nothing will satisfy them but God. God wants us to be like Him through Christ because we were born to be in a relationship with God in life and death. In Christ, we are re-created to be like God in righteousness and holiness. Such redemption is only possible by the grace of God through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Only in Christ can our distorted image of God be restored.