

No.2, The Being of Man

Man is the creature of God – that is the fundamental premise taught in Scripture with regard to man’s existence. It is not only taught in the Genesis account of the creation of all things, but is asserted and affirmed in various places throughout the Scriptures. It is highly significant that Christ Himself speaks in such a manner as to verify the truth of man’s direct creation by God and also to verify the Scripture in Genesis that records the creation of man, Matt 19: 4. We noted as well that Paul, in some of his great theological discussions, verifies the direct creation of man by God – Rom 5 & 1 Cor 15. Note also Col 3: 10 – while this verse is dealing with the subject of the regeneration of the sinner and the consequent possession of spiritual knowledge or enlightenment, it makes clear reference to the original creation of man by God. Note the closing words – “*after the image of Him that created him.*” These words verify that God created man; and that man was created in God’s image.

It is this very point that was in view in the closing point of last week’s study. On that occasion we noted three points by way of attempting to summarise the details of man’s creation: *the sequence, the solemnity, and the significance of the creation of man*. Under the latter point we looked briefly at Gen 2: 7 which shows a clear distinction between the body & soul of man. He is body & soul and is therefore distinguished from the rest of the creatures. It is said of man only that God “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*” Man’s distinction from the animals was already asserted in Gen 1: 26 in that he is there said to have been given dominion over the animal creation. But in the more detailed Gen 2: 7 account of man’s creation there is this vital point of God breathing the breath of life into him. The result was that “*man became a living soul.*” The significance of this language in the Genesis context is that by the breath of life being infused into him Adam not only became alive but he became a being completely distinct from all other earthly creatures. Hence, in view in these words in Gen 2: 7 there is vital instruction about the being of man. Note the following points:

**1. Into man alone did the Lord breathe the breath of life.**

The Hebrew word for “breath” is *neshamah*, the word also being translated “spirit” on a few occasions. However, the point is that it is never used of the animals but of man only. Some contend that it is used of animals in Gen 7: 21, 22. However, the words of v.22 refer back to the words “every man” at the end of v.21. The Hebrew word for “man” in v.21 is *adam*, referring to mankind. Thus, the words read “all mankind” coupled with v.22 what is being said is that all the rest of mankind in whose nostrils was the breath of life but still on the dry land, i.e. not in the ark, died in the flood. So, here again this terminology “the breath of life” is used only of man, distinguishing him from the animal creation.

**2. By the “breath of life” God imparted to man more than physical life.**

Certainly the principle of physical life was imparted to man at his creation. See Job 33: 4 where Elihu speaks of creation and uses this word *neshamah* with reference to his possession & enjoyment of physical life. See also Isaiah 2: 22. However, other Scriptures employ this same word in such a way as to show that by “the breath of life” God imparted at least two other properties that clearly distinguish him from the animal creation.

**(a) First, spiritual understanding of God and His moral law.**

Before commenting on this issue of spiritual understanding, it is appropriate here to comment on the faculty of rational speech that belongs to man only as far as earthly creatures are concerned.

The capacity of rational speech is associated with the ability to understand; and God has given this capacity to man only. Animals make sounds and obey human commands; and a few birds are able to imitate human speech, but it is only man who is able to articulate words for the purpose of communication. Indeed, God Himself employs rational speech but it is toward man alone that He does so. In that fashion He has ennobled man and honoured him above the animals. And there is no doubt that this faculty of rational speech was imparted to man when God gave him the breath of life.

But, in examining other Scripture where *neshamah* is employed it will be seen that it is by the breath of life that man was given spiritual understanding. See Job 32: 8 where the word “inspiration” is the translation of this same Hebrew word *neshamah*. The verse teaches very clearly that by the breath of Almighty man is given understanding. What is this understanding?

In the context of the book it is a reference to *spiritual understanding*. The whole debate in Job is all about the ways of God with men. Elihu’s contention was that Job & his three friends had erred in their analysis of God’s dealings with Job, v.9. But since by the *neshamah* of God man has been given understanding Elihu was ready to give his opinion, v.10.

Therefore, Elihu is essentially saying that the breath of God originally gave man spiritual understanding, a point verified by Paul in Romans 2: 14, 15. Notice from Paul’s teaching that the spiritual understanding God originally gave man pertains to the moral law. His argument is that because the heathen are able to give a natural obedience to the law this is the proof that the law was originally written on their hearts. Thus, by the breath of God at his creation man received spiritual understanding of God and His law.

**(b) Second, by the breath of God man had conscience placed in him.**

See Prov 20: 27 – in this verse the word “spirit” is a translation of *neshamah*. In this text the *neshamah* is said to be the Lord’s candle or lamp searching out man’s inner being. It is very obvious that the *neshamah* here is conscience as is indicated by its searching ability. Conscience is the human awareness that God ought to be obeyed; and it is also the capacity to distinguish between what is morally right or morally wrong. This capacity of conscience does not belong to mere animals and thus man is distinguished from them.