

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, May 21, 1989, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

GENESIS 1:26, 5:3; COLOSSIANS 1:15; ROMANS 8:3

“And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”

“And Adam became the father of a son in his own likeness.”

“Christ, Who is the image of the invisible God.”

“God, sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

YOU HAVE A “DOUBLE”!

Everyone, they say, has a “double.” This is not hard to believe when you consider that there are now five billion people on this planet. Each person has, on the front of his head, a tiny patch of skin, roughly six inches by four, whose topography, apart from variations due to race and sex and age, is all pretty much the same. Surely it is no surprise if, amid such vast multitudes of people, some are so similar as almost to seem duplicates.

Most frequently, of course, these striking physical similarities occur in families. The classic example of this, I suppose, is identical twins. In his interesting volume of reminiscences entitled My Book of Memory, Silas K. Hocking records that years ago there lived in Pontypool, England, identical twins by the name of Roberts. A man who knew them both well was walking one day down a street in the town when he saw one of the brothers approaching. Going up to him and extending his hand, he said, “Ah, Mr. Roberts, as you were coming along I could not tell for the life of me whether it was you or your brother. Now I see it’s your brother!” Sometimes in families there are similarities as close as that.

There are instances, however, when such lifelike resemblances are to be found beyond the bounds of particular families. Discerning observers claim to have discovered them even among people living at widely different periods of history. Take Cardinal Newman, the celebrated 19th century English divine. He is said to have been almost a duplicate of Julius Caesar. Anthony Froude, the historian, calls attention to this fact in a brilliant pen-portrait of Newman. He writes, “His appearance was striking. He was above middle height, slight and spare. His head was large, his face notably like that of Julius Caesar. The forehead, the shape of the ears and the nose, were almost the same. The lines of the mouth were very remarkable, and I should say exactly the same.”

During World War II a member of British Intelligence, Mr. M. E. C. James, acted as “stand-in” for General Montgomery, and he later published his memoirs under the title, I was Monty’s Double.

Well, I want to carry this matter of resemblances a stage farther, to the highest realm of all, and see how all this applies to our relationship to God.

1. The Image of the Creator

“And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”

Modern man is made increasingly conscious of his likeness to the lower orders of creation. In our public schools a child is taught to regard himself as a sort of superior animal. Well, the likeness is there, but it is merely anatomical and physiological. And it is a likeness which is utterly insignificant in the light of the categorical difference which divides man from the brute creation, a difference which is moral and spiritual.

Someone has spoken of

“The ape in the sanctuary, who
Swings by his irreverent tail
All over the most holy place”

Can you imagine a monkey at prayer? Can you picture an ape on its knees in adoration before the living God? Of course you can't. And the fact that you can't proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that the contrast between the human and the animal is infinitely greater than any physical similarity which may exist between them.

In view of this, let me ask you a question. It is this: Is it wise to be always insisting on our likeness to the lower, and saying never a word about our likeness to the Higher? Is it sensible to be continually pointing out our similarity to the denizens of the jungle, and yet be strangely silent about our similarity to the divine? Is it proper to be constantly stressing our bodily resemblance to that which is beneath us, while remaining oblivious to our spiritual resemblance to Him Who is immeasurably above us?

Not long after Charles Darwin had published his famous book, The Origin of Species, one of his nieces made this perceptive remark: “But Uncle,” she said, “if you tell people that they have come from monkeys, won't they begin to live like monkeys?” A good question! For, after all, if we conceive of our distant ancestor as a hairy anthropoid, swinging by his tail from tree to tree in the primeval jungle, we may secretly envy his athletic abilities, but really, we haven't much to live up to, have we?! But, if we habitually think of ourselves as the special creation of a personal Creator Who is Himself the absolute embodiment of goodness, beauty and truth; if we remember that He has made us “in His image and after His Own likeness”; then we have something to live up to -- something that will make us ashamed of our moral failure -- something that will inspire us to match up to God's wonderful blueprint for our lives.

The Bible does admit our kinship with the lower orders of life. But that is not where it lays the chief stress. Always its main emphasis is on our likeness to our Maker. That likeness, it says, is no accident; it is the result of deliberate divine design. “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness.’” “Man,” you say, “has much in common with the beasts.” That is true. But that is not the peculiar and differentiating thing about him. The peculiar and unique thing about us is our moral and spiritual resemblance to our Creator, the fact that we bear the image of our Maker and can therefore have fellowship with our God.

2. **The Image of the Sinner.**

“And Adam became the father of a son in his own likeness.”

Adam had been created in the likeness of the holy God, but he had fallen into sin, and so Adam became the father of a son “in his own likeness.” What an appalling descent! What a tragic and terrible deterioration! From the image of God to the image of the sinner! And to this day, in each one of us, the two likenesses are plainly perceivable. On the one hand, there is something of the image of God, defaced though it may be; but on the other hand, no less certainly, we have on us also the stamp of depravity.

You remember the story in the Gospels of how some of His enemies came to Jesus one day with a loaded question about paying taxes to the Romans. “Master,” they said, “is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” And when a coin was handed to Him, He held it up, and asked, “Whose likeness on the inscription is this?” Instantly they exclaimed, “Caesar’s.” And that was true. Caesar’s head was on the coin and so the coin belonged ultimately to the Roman Imperial Treasury.

But there was a more basic question to be asked, and it is this: Who gave Caesar his head in the first place? Beyond all doubt, the coin belonged to Caesar because it bore his image; but whose image, even though defaced and almost obliterated by sin, did Caesar bear, and to Whom, therefore, did Caesar ultimately belong? To GOD, of course.

We know that the Caesar here referred to was Tiberius -- by this time a wretched old man, from whose debauched and dissolute character practically all likeness to the divine had been erased. That is what sin always does. It progressively effaces from the human soul the original image of God. You have seen an old coin, maybe 80 years old, and when you look at the face on the coin, it is almost unrecognizable, worn off by age and use. So it is with us. The passing of the years brings that inexorable effacement of the image of God unless the work of regeneration through Christ has taken place within us.

The French have a proverb which says, “Sin makes ugly.” How could it be otherwise? Anything that makes us unlike our Creator Who is the absolute embodiment of immortal beauty, is bound to make us ugly.

You remember Lincoln’s comment when he said he did not like a certain Cabinet member’s face. “But the poor man is not responsible for his face,” replied an advocate. “Every man over forty is responsible for his face,” countered Lincoln.

One of the most dashing and romantic figures in Scottish history is Prince Charles Edward Stuart, “Bonnie Prince Charlie,” as he is familiarly known, the chivalrous and magnetic champion of a lost cause. He has often been regarded as a perfect specimen of handsome masculinity; and very likely in his youth he was. But what about him later on? A Scottish friend of mine told me once about visiting an art gallery, and on a wall at some distance from him he saw an oil painting representing a human face so ugly as to be positively fascinating. Curiosity compelled him to go over and see whose face it was. Imagine how he felt when he read --

“Bonnie Prince Charlie, aged 59”

Sin makes ugly. That is its inevitable consequence, for if there is beauty in holiness there is most certainly ugliness in iniquity.

A Danish poet relates a dream of death. On his passing into the world beyond, an angel met him and showed him a great golden book. “What is that?” he inquired. “It is the book of your life,” came the reply. Looking more closely he saw that there was some writing on the first page. “What is there?” he asked. “These are your evil acts,” said the angel, “and you see that they are many.” The angel turned the page, and the dreamer saw that the next sheet was more closely written. “These,” said the angel, “are your evil words, and you see that there are more of them than there are acts, for a man speaks more than he acts.” The next page was still more closely written. “What are these?” asked the dreamer. “These are your evil thoughts, and you see that they are very many, for a man thinks more than he speaks and acts.” With trembling voice, the dreamer asked what the fourth page contained. The angel turned it over, and it was black -- jet black. “This represents your evil heart,” said the angel, “for it is out of the blackness of the heart that all thoughts and words and acts come.” And, my friend, your heart by nature is black, and so is mine; because we are sons and daughters of Adam, made in his likeness -- sinful and undone.

3. The Image of the Savior.

From what I have said it will be evident that the great problem confronting God since sin entered the world was the problem of restoring to sinful man the lost image of his Maker. It was a problem in comparison with which the creation of the universe itself was to Him mere child’s play. “It was,” as Dr. Thomas Chalmers once put it, “a problem fit for a God, and only God could solve it.”

And this is what He in fact did in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ! Scripture affirms that our Savior is “the Image of the invisible God” -- that is to say, He is the perfect manifestation of God. Indeed, when He walked this earth 2,000 years ago, He did so as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He was and is uniquely and supremely God; and He was and is truly and completely Man -- the God-Man; and to see what God is like, we must look at Jesus.

This word “image” in Greek was the word that was used for a portrait. Isn’t that a wonderful affirmation — Jesus Christ is, as it were, the portrait, the photograph of the eternal God. In Jesus Christ you see nothing less than the personal characteristics and the distinguishing marks of God Himself.

Jesus had to be both God and man in order to be our Savior. Only God. Himself could pay the penalty of His broken law; and only man could take man’s place in atonement and redemption. Only the infinite God-Man could atone for an infinite number of sins committed by an infinite number of people. And so, Scripture makes a further glorious affirmation -- “God, sending His Own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in sinful man.”

The Scripture assures us time and time again that Jesus Christ, the God-Man, was perfectly

sinless. "He had (or committed) no sin." we are told in 2 Corinthians 5:21. The New Testament declares that although He was tempted in every way just as we are, He was yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He never gave in; He never fell.

There is, of course, a paradox here. Perhaps I could express it best in terms of two simple syllogisms:

- a. Jesus is God.
God cannot sin.
Therefore, Jesus could not sin.

But then reflect upon this second syllogism:

- b. Jesus is Man.
To be truly Man He had to be tempted, and temptation to be real must entail at least the theoretical possibility of a fall. Therefore, Jesus could have sinned.

Now I believe that the reasoning behind both these syllogisms is indisputable; and that while at all costs we must cling to our conviction of the absolute deity of our Lord, at the same time we must not so interpret His deity as to empty His humanity of all reality.

The early Church Fathers, most of whom spoke Latin, contrasted two affirmations concerning our Lord:

- a. Non potuit peccare -- He was not able to sin; and
- b. Potuit non peccare -- He was able not to sin.

Now Scripture never teaches the first affirmation, but it always teaches the second -- He was able not to sin.

I heard recently about a man who lost a leg in a mining accident. After his hospitalization, he went to be fitted for an artificial limb. When it was strapped on, the attendant told him to get up and walk across the floor. Awkwardly the man struggled to his feet, staggered a few paces, and then dragging himself back painfully to his chair, slumped into it, utterly exhausted. "I'll never be able to walk again," he exclaimed. "Why not?" said the attendant, "watch this." And so, saying, he strode briskly across the room. "Ah," said the amputee, "that's all right for you -- you haven't got my disability." "Oh, haven't I?" replied the attendant. "Look!" And, pulling up the legs of his trousers, he showed the man not just one artificial limb, but two!

Sometimes when I think of the peerless moral splendor of Jesus, I am inclined to say, "Ah, Jesus, it was easy enough for You. You were God, and You could not sin. You never knew the awful intensity of the moral conflict in which I am perpetually engaged." But with the Bible open before me, I know that that is not true. I know that He was tempted in every way just as I am. He was exposed to all the seductions of sin, yet never once, in either thought or imagination did He capitulate to them - and that is why He could be and is our Savior from both sin's guilt

and power.

In short,

1. Man was created in the image and likeness of the holy God.
2. Man sinned, and thus the image was defaced and man was condemned.
3. Christ, the infinite God-Man, the image or portrait of the invisible God, came to earth, and condemned sin by dying for it.

And this blessed, heaven-sent Savior offers eternal life as a free gift to anyone who will repent of sin, accept Him, and trust Him alone for salvation.

He says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

What an offer, and what a Savior!

Do you know Him as your personal Savior?

Oh to go back across the years long vanished,
To have the words unsaid, the deeds undone;
The errors cancelled, the deep shadows banished
In the glad sense of a new world begun!

I may go back across the years long vanished,
I may renew my childhood, Lord, in Thee;
And in the shadow of Thy Cross have banished
All other shadows that encompass me!

AMEN.