

# Biblical Anthropology, the Key to Some Religious Problems

by J.H. Garrison

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*This sermon explores the importance of understanding man's nature and its relation to the Bible's teachings, with a focus on the incarnation and its significance.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:27, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 13:12, Philippians 2:5, Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 5:12, Revelation 21:2

**Topics:** "Biblical Anthropology", "Christology"

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## Description

J.H. Garrison preaches about the profound questioning of this age, emphasizing the three great questions: What is man, who is Christ, and what salvation has He prepared for man. The Bible stands out as the only book providing satisfactory answers to these questions, securing its supreme claim to acceptance. The sermon delves into the concept of man being created in the image of God intellectually, morally, and volitionally, highlighting the need for salvation to restore this image. It explores the necessity, motive, and scope of the incarnation, shedding light on Christology, soteriology, and the ultimate consummation of redeemed manhood and society.

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## Transcript

PERHAPS the symbol or character that would most fitly represent this age is the interrogation point. It is an age of profound questioning of everything in the heavens above and in the earth beneath. There is nothing so sacred or so venerable as to escape the interrogation point. The three great questions of this age, and of the ages, are:

1. What is man, what kind of a being is he?
2. Who is Christ, and the God whom He reveals?
3. What salvation or destiny has He prepared for man?

The man that is not interested in these questions gives evidence of partial, or total, obscuration of that which is most distinctive of our human nature--its rational and moral faculties.

It is proof of the superiority of the Bible to all other books in the world, that it is the only book that furnishes satisfactory answers to these great questions; and in that fact, in my judgment, lies [461] the Bible's

supreme claim to the confidence and acceptance of men, and also its character for an assured immortality in the literature of the world. The fact that this book alone, among all the volumes and tomes of the libraries of the world, answers these three great questions of the human soul, makes it the Book of books. Think you that the destructive critics are likely to overthrow such a book as this? And the sooner we come to recognize the fact that it is because the Bible speaks to the human heart as no other book does on these great themes, that it is a Divine book, the sooner we will cease to be alarmed at the inquiries and investigations concerning its genuineness. The fact that the Bible opens to us more windows in heaven than all the libraries of the earth, and has a dynamic force which they do not possess, is the reason why it has such a hold upon our humanity, and the reason why we need entertain no fears whatever as to its destiny. Its safety is secure. We may look on undaunted at all the crucial investigations it is now undergoing at the hands of critics. A book that brings satisfactory answers to these great questions, the world will not easily let go. Until somebody invents a better book--one that will furnish more satisfactory answers to these vital questions--the world will hold on to the Bible.

Now let us test this old Book on one of these questions I have suggested, namely, "What is man?" If we put the question to materialistic science for an answer--that part of science which takes no note of [462] man's spiritual nature or of the phenomena associated therewith--the answer is, "Man is a splendid animal. He stands at the very summit of the animal creation. He is a piece of finely organized clay. He is a marvelous organism; but at death he is dissolved back into his original elements, and that is all there is of him. There is no part of him that survives the grave, for we have analyzed him scientifically, and we find nothing in him but the material." Are you satisfied with that answer? Does it meet the demands of your heart? Nay, it does not meet the demands of your reason. If that is all there is of man, why these longings and aspirations after something better, something higher? Why would God mock us by putting in our hearts this deathless aspiration, to end only in the grave?

Turn from materialism, and make your inquiry of Agnosticism, "What is man?" and it replies with a show of modesty: "We do not know that there is, or that there is not, anything in man that will survive the grave. We do not know that there is any God. If there be a God, He is unknowable. The whole question of God's existence and man's destiny lies beyond the range of any evidence we can accept. We do not know." Does that satisfy? Are you willing to take that to the death-bed of your dying mother and read it? Are you willing to lie down on your own death-bed with only that for a pillow? No; you turn away heart-sick from science and philosophy, and, turning to the old Bible your mother [463] loved so well, you open its lids, and on its faded pages, bearing, it may be, the tear-stains of your mother or of your father, you read the answer to the question, "What is man?" in these marvelous words I have quoted: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

These are, indeed, wonderful words. We fail to be startled at them and their wonderful significance only because of their familiar sound. Prof. Caird, in his "Evolution of Religion," sees in Greek art, sculpture and poetry, evidence that the Grecian mind recognized in man a higher expression of Divinity than was to be found in the works of nature, and argues that the Greek religion was therefore an upward step from the grosser idolatry of the East in the direction of monotheism. I ask you to consider the fact that the author of Genesis, whoever he may have been, writing centuries before Grecian philosophy had reached its acme, not only recognized the one true God, but saw in man an incarnation of Divinity, and rose to the sublime thought, above all pantheism and idolatry, that "man is created in the image of God." Now let us approach that passage reverently, while we ask in what sense it can be true that man, whom science pronounces to

be simply clay, is akin to God, and has been made in His likeness. It can not be that he is in the corporeal image of God, for "God is a spirit," and, for that matter, [464] man is a spirit too. He may exist in the body or out of the body; it is no essential part of man. It is, therefore, in his immaterial nature that he must look for this likeness.

Affirmatively, then, we may say that man is created in the image of God intellectually, or mentally, because, as the astronomer Kepler expressed it, "We can think God's thoughts after Him." We are capable of seeing God's plan in the numerous adaptations of this material world to man's wants. Because we can trace out the laws that govern the material universe and see how God made it, and why He made it, and thus follow God's plan in the material world, we are sure that man is created in the mental image of God. Otherwise, the universe would appear to him as it does to other animals. It presents no plan or purpose to 'the mere animal. Man is the only creature who is capable of seeing God's thoughts materialized in order and beauty. And again, the very fact that God has spoken to man is evidence that he is created in God's image intellectually; otherwise, God's revelation would be unintelligible. We do not speak to those who do not understand us. We do not enter into moral discussions with our horse, our dog, or even the anthropoid ape. Why not? Because, not being in our image mentally, we can not convey to them these great thoughts. I hold that God's revelation made to man is evidence of his creation in the intellectual image of God. [465]

Man is created in the moral image of God. How do we know that? Because man's moral sense approves the moral law of God. When God says in His moral law "Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not murder; Thou shalt not lie," man's moral nature responds at once: "That is right; a man ought not to do these things." He may steal, he may lie, he may murder, but he knows that in doing these things he is doing wrong, and violating not only God's moral law as written in the decalogue, but the same moral law as written upon man's own nature. God so made man that he can not disobey His will without at the same time doing violence to his own nature. You can see at once that if man did not have a moral nature like that of God, it would do away with all accountability to God. If, for instance, when God says "Thou shalt not murder," man's moral nature should say, "It is right to murder, and I must murder, my conscience condemns me if I fail to murder," then, if God should condemn man for committing murder, He would condemn him for being true to his own nature, which we can not conceive. I take it then as beyond contradiction that man's moral nature is like God's; that God created him in His own image morally, and placed in every man's bosom a witness (some one has called it God's vicegerent on earth) which condemns him when he goes contrary to its behest, and which approves him when he does that which he believes to be right. [466]

But still further: Man is created in the image of God volitionally; that is, as to his will. The latest word in science is, that behind all phenomena in the material universe, behind all motion, behind all force, is the will of the Supreme Being of the universe. We know that behind all man's acts lies the decision of his will. God is a free, self-determining Being, who chooses, decides and acts. In creating man, He gave him the same freedom of will, the power to choose his own destiny, free from any compulsion, and to act according to his own choosing. I know there is a school of theologians, and of philosophers, too, for that matter, that call in question this freedom of the will. But against all the theological reasoning and all the philosophical speculation, I place the testimony of every man's consciousness--that he has the power to do or not to do certain acts. You simply know that. You can not be beguiled into believing anything to the contrary. Otherwise, it would be impossible for you to feel any sense of remorse. No man's conscience condemns him for doing what he can not avoid doing. It is only what we have the power to do, and ought to do, but do not; or what we have the power to refrain from doing, and ought to refrain from doing, and yet

do, that gives us a sense of demerit. So the very fact that our conscience condemns us for any act is evidence of our freedom of will. This truth has a very wide application. [467] The whole realm of theology and soteriology hangs upon it.

Someone may say: "That was a very dangerous sort of being for God to turn loose in the universe--a man made in God's image morally, intellectually, volitionally, and yet put into clay and allied to the earth." Yes, there is no question about that. Somebody has said that nothing creates such a commotion as a thinker turned loose in the world. But here is not only a thinker turned loose, but a moral judge and a chooser as well. But God had this alternative He must either create a being who would have the power to do evil if he desired to do it, or He must make a machine, whose action would possess no moral quality. God did not care to make a machine. Men could make machines. He wanted to create a man. He wanted to create a being who would reflect His glory and His character. They could not be fully reflected in the material universe nor in all the lower orders of life. I think, too, that the Infinite Being, who is most fitly described by the name Love, wanted a being in the universe that could love Him. In all the material universe--mountains, seas, lakes, and among all the lower animals--there was not a being susceptible of a single emotion of gratitude to the Divine hand that gave it being. Think you not that God hungered for some response, some being that would love Him? And so, with the alternative before Him, knowing that if He made a being that could do no wrong, He would make at [468] the same time a being that could not do right, He accepted the responsibility, and created man in His own image. And here, my brethren, is the true basis for an optimistic view of the world.

I am an optimist; and I like to have a rational basis for any view I may hold. The infinite God, as gracious and benevolent as He is omniscient and omnipotent, with all the pages of human history unfolded before Him--pages of crime, of sorrow, of struggle and defeat, of progress and victory--chose to create, and, as a matter of fact, did create man in His own image. That would have been impossible had not God foreseen that the final outcome of human history would be a justification for creating man in His image. So, whatever clouds may obscure the sun, and whatever reflex currents there may be in the tide of human progress, I still believe that the God who made and rules the universe, and who created man in His own image, will bring order and harmony and victory at last out of all this struggle and apparent defeat.

#### THE KEY APPLIED

Now, I want to take this great, luminous truth that stands in the forefront of the Bible and apply it to some of the difficult problems in religion. Others will occur to you capable of solution by the same key. When we get a great truth like this, it is not wise to lay it away as if it had no vital relation to other truths. One truth will help us to understand [469] another. Tennyson expressed this thought in the profound lines:

"Flower in the crannied wall,

I pluck you out of the crannies;

Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,

Little flower--but if I could understand

What you are, root and all, and all in all,

I should know what God and man is."

To know one truth, in all its relations, is to know all truth. And so let us take this truth and apply it to the solution of some of those great problems that have puzzled so many thoughtful, serious people. One of the great problems to which I would apply this truth is

## I. POSSIBILITY OF THE INCARNATION

Today the most prominent word in religious discussion is the incarnation, and a great many good people stumble at that doctrine. They see the moral beauty of Christ's character, and are willing to crown 'Him master or king of men; but they cannot accept the supreme truth of the incarnation--the stooping down of the Son of God from heavenly heights to earthly conditions. It seems to me this great truth of man's nature throws light on this question. If man is created morally, intellectually and volitionally in God's image, I can understand the possibility of the incarnation. Reverently let me say it, I cannot see how the doctrine of the incarnation could be held independently of this great [470] truth of man's creation in the image of God. I cannot see how God could manifest His character in a being not created in His own image. Try to think of the possibility of God's taking the form of any lower animal--say a dog, or a horse, or an ape--and in either of these forms manifesting His glory, righteousness, truth, and His infinite love for the world! It is inconceivable. Why? Because these lower orders of beings were not created in the image of God, and are incapable of receiving into themselves the divinity to express the Divine character. Ah ! that is a marvelous fact, that the eternal Logos, existing before all worlds, should clothe Himself in flesh, and fill out to its utmost possibility this human nature with the inflowing life of God! He thus manifests to principalities and to powers His glory, His character and His truth.

Of course, if God is to manifest Himself in the flesh, it must be subject to human conditions and limitations. Some, as it seems to me, superficial critics have been unable to accept the doctrine of the true and essential divinity of Jesus Christ, because, when in the world, He hungered, He was weary, He wept, He died. There are indications of certain self-limitations which are necessarily involved in His taking our human nature. He said, "The time of the coming of the Son of man is known only to the Father, not to the angels, not even to the Son." Is that a reason to call in question His divinity? He said again, "My Father is greater than I." Read [471] that grand word of Paul: "Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize--a thing to be seized--to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men." What a fact! The infinite Son of God took upon Him this self-limitation as a necessary result of His incarnation, that He might work the great problem of human redemption on a common plane with man. Was He less divine for so doing? Was King Alfred less a king when he went down among his subjects in the garb of a peasant and visited their humble homes, and shared their poverty, that he might understand and better their condition? Was he not all the more a king because he was willing to do that for the love he bore his subjects? Shall we pay less honor to Jesus Christ because He was willing to stoop down and take upon Himself these necessary limitations in order to bear our sins, and thus accomplish the redemption of the race? A thousand times, No!

Not only does this primal truth show the possibility of the incarnation, but it furnishes or suggests, also,

## II. MOTIVE OF THE INCARNATION

Now, a great many good people have been seriously puzzled as to why the Son of God should come to this earth, which, astronomy tells us, is a very small speck in the universe. Why, it is asked, should God make this planet the scene of the marvelous [472] tragedy of the crucifixion? I remember there came to my camp once in the mountains a man who announced to me, almost under his breath, that he had lost

faith in God. He could not believe that God would send His only begotten Son to an insignificant world like this, to become incarnate, to suffer, bleed and die for such a race. That was more than he could accept. And I think the Psalmist had some such thought when he said: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" I find the answer to these questions in the fact that man is the child of God, created in His image. Is not that a sufficient motive for the incarnation, and for all the suffering of the Son of God?

Has anybody been puzzled to understand why the father of Charlie Ross traveled all over the world, following every rumor, that he might find his boy? Did you need any explanation of that fact? Not if you had a boy. How far would you follow your boy? Would you stop at the Mississippi River, state lines, or national boundaries? No, you would cross the ocean, go round the world, spend all your money, mortgage the farm and homestead, that you might find the dear boy and bring him back to the old home. Certainly you would. I know you would if you have a paternal heart. But man is the child of God. I know we have obscured that truth, or let it [473] fall into the background for fear we would in some way lower the necessity of regeneration, and of adoption into the family of God, and becoming children of God by grace. But this cannot be; for this fact of our being children of God by grace has no meaning only as it is based on the primal sonship--our having been created in the image of God mentally, morally and volitionally. I know of no truth that has more power to win man than to go and tell him: "No matter how sinful you are, no matter how low you have fallen, you are a child of God; you bear the stamp of Divinity upon you. Come home, wandering child, come home!" The prodigal son was still a son out in the swinefields. He was a lost son, it is true, but he was a son. Let us lift up that old truth that stands in the forefront of the Bible, give it its original prominence, and we shall find the true motive of the incarnation, and understand that the long journey of the Son of God to this earth was to search for His Father's lost children, to bring, them back to the Father's house. I see also in this truth

### III. NECESSITY OF THE INCARNATION

With certain theories of man's nature and condition, there is no necessity for the incarnation, and the cross is without meaning. It has no place in such a theory. If a man is to be converted and regenerated independently of the laws of his mental and moral nature, by naked omnipotence, there is [474] no meaning in the incarnation and the cross. But a being created in the image of God, mentally, morally and volitionally, cannot be driven into the kingdom of God; he must be won by high and mighty motives. God knew man was such a being, and so furnished the mightiest motives known to God: He sent His Son into this world--His only begotten Son--as the highest possible exhibition of His love. And the divine Son hurried to the world that God so loved, to rescue man from his lost condition. That was the measure of God's love, and it is God's argument and motive to win man. Whatever else it accomplishes, it breaks down the stubborn will of man, convincing him of the love and compassion of God, and drawing him by moral force back into the arms of the Father. I can see the necessity for the incarnation and the cross to save such a being as man, with a mind to see, a heart to feel, and a will to decide. No being of less dignity and power than the Son of God could be the Saviour of men. So much as to the bearing of this truth on Christology. It has an important bearing, also, on

### IV. SOTERIOLOGY, OR THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE SALVATION PROMISED TO MAN

## IN THE GOSPEL

The author of the Hebrew letter speaks of "so great salvation" offered to man. A being possessed of these great possibilities--great even in his ruins, defaced by sin, and out of harmony with his own [475] nature and with the moral universe--is to be saved. He is so great a being that the world cannot satisfy the hunger of his soul. We have an explanation here, too, of that great restlessness that marks the human race. Away from God it cannot be satisfied. The spirit came from Him, and can find complete satisfaction only in Him. It is said if you take a shell from the ocean's shore thousands of miles inland, and put it to your ear, it will sing of its ocean home. Its convolutions murmur the music of the deep sea. So of the soul wandering far from God. A superficial observer will say, "It is all bad, and wholly evil;" but bend down your ear close enough to its inmost heart, and you find it moaning out its lamentation for God--the great and mighty God. Not always conscious of its needs, the heart of man yet hungers for God, and in its blindness runs into all manner of excess and dissipation to find rest. Such a being requires a "great salvation" to be commensurate with the greatness of the being that is to be saved, and the greatness of his needs.

Again, this key-truth marks out the boundaries of this great salvation. If man was created in the image of God mentally, morally and volitionally, salvation means nothing less than the restoration of God's image to man in all these departments of his nature. Mentally, man has been dwarfed by sin. He sees but a few things, and these imperfectly. Instead of walking the earth the glorious being he might have been had not sin obscured his vision, [476] he is a mere pigmy. This "great salvation" will make him whole in intellect. He knows here only in part; after a while he will know even as he is known. This is to me one of the most entrancing visions of the future life. We are to go on and on forever advancing in knowledge. Freed from the blinding power of sin, unfettered by the limitations of the body, and under the direct tuition of the great Teacher, we shall scale the higher to inaccessible heights of wisdom, and shall have such visions of God and of His moral universe as are impossible to us while we are in the flesh. We shall be saved intellectually.

And so, too, morally, man is maimed, wounded, dwarfed; but he is, under happier influences, to be developed and rounded out in beautiful symmetry like his Master, in the society of "the spirits of just men made perfect." You say, "Not now." Then hereafter, for this work must go on and on until it is accomplished. It is God's predestined purpose that we be conformed to the image of His Son. Our Presbyterian friends silenced Professor Briggs for believing, among other things, in progressive sanctification after death. I do not know that I ever believed or preached anything else. I declare my faith, my untroubled faith, in the progressive sanctification, both now and on the other side of the death line, of every Christian until he be brought into the complete image of Jesus Christ; and if that be heresy, my brethren, you must make the most of it. [477] Man's will, too, is to be so harmonized with the will of God, that in doing the very things he desires he will be acting along the line of God's will and purposes. All conflict between man's will and God's will must end in his will's being merged into that of God. Not that man will lose his individuality, but his volitions will spring from a will harmonized with God's will. And the body of our humiliation--even that is to be fashioned like unto the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself. This is, indeed, a glorious salvation. It is not the mechanical idea of salvation--that a man is to be saved because he gets into a place called heaven, or is lost if he is put into a place called hell. Salvation consists, rather, according to the view I have presented, in being restored to the image of God. It is character built after the Divine pattern. Nothing short of this is salvation in its highest Biblical meaning, and no other salvation would be adequate for a being created in the image of God.

## THE CONSUMMATION

Sometimes I have a vision--it must be a dim one compared with the reality--of redeemed manhood. I see a being of wondrous beauty standing beside His Master, and looking like Him. He has a kingly bearing, and from his eye there flashes the fire of an immortal genius. There is a crown upon his brow, [478] a scepter is in his hand, and he is sharing lordship in the universe with the Lord Jesus Christ. I ask, who is that wonderful being? and an angel answers, "It is man, redeemed and glorified, and made like unto his Master--God's work completed in him." That is only one man. Take human society, for this great salvation does not stop at the individual man. It saves society, breaking down all caste, all division-walls, severing all chains, lifting all men up to a common level under the great Fatherhood of God. This is an essential part of the truth that "Man is created in the image of God." When that truth is rightly understood, society will be reconstructed, and men will crown Jesus Christ King of kings, and He shall rule in business, in commerce, in politics, in social life. And God's will shall be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven. The New Jerusalem will have descended from God out of heaven, and the glad earth, redeemed from sin, will reflect back the smile of God. Then shall we hear the grand hallelujah chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing, forever and ever." Amen and amen! [479]

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