

Down From Above

by Vance Havner

God works from above, and His dealings with humanity are always from a position of superiority and authority, but through Jesus Christ, we can be born from above and see the kingdom of God.

Scripture: Jeremiah 17:9, John 3:3, John 6:38, John 8:23, Romans 1:21-22, Romans 3:23, 1 Corinthians 15:47, Colossians 3:1-2, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:2

Topics: "Divine Intervention", "The Need for Salvation"

Description

Vance Havner emphasizes that God's work is from above, contrasting it with human belief in evolution and self-improvement. He argues that humanity is not on an upward trajectory but rather in a state of decline due to sin, needing salvation through Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven to redeem us. Havner highlights the necessity of a new birth from above for true transformation, as man cannot save himself. He warns against the illusion of progress without God, asserting that only divine intervention can lead to genuine change. Ultimately, he points to the New Jerusalem, which will come down from above, as the ultimate hope for humanity.

Transcript

"And he said unto them, You are from beneath; I am from above: you are of this world; I am not of this world." -- JOHN 8:23.

From beginning to end, the Bible teaches that God works down from above, not up from below. This, of course, is contrary to human reasoning. Man teaches that we are on our way from the bottom to the top, that we started as sentient jelly on the shoreland of some prehistoric age and that through millions of years of evolution we have been working our way up from below. But God says that in His dealings with us from start to finish He works down from above.

To begin with, God says that man was made in God's image but he fell. And when he fell, he did not fall upward. Adam started better than he finished. He was not a cave-man swinging a club but a Godlike being who fell. "In Adam all die." "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin." "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

For quite a while we have been taught that man started with no knowledge of God but that he has worked his way up through animism, fetishism, totemism, polytheism; that in the Jewish nation he reached monotheism and in Jesus Christ he carried that idea to its highest ideals. But the truth is, man started with

a knowledge of God, but when he knew God he glorified Him not as God neither was thankful, but became vain in his imagination, so that his foolish heart was darkened and professing himself to be wise he became a fool. The first chapter of Romans presents us with a picture of degradation and depravity that forever debunks the idea that man has been continually seeking God's fellowship through the ages. Even the Israelites, when they did know God, were continually turning from God to idols. Such has been the course of church history. Such has been individual experience. The human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and its natural bent is away from God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Men hate God. They do not want God, they resent Him, they are rebels against Him, they make gods of their own.

Whoever assumes that man is kindly disposed toward God, and that if God's love be presented and the winsomeness of Christ be preached, men will fall over each other rushing down church aisles to be saved, is in for a big surprise. The facts simply do not bear that out. God's Word does not teach it. It is not true to history or experience. Jesus Christ lived among us in all His winsomeness and we spat upon Him, crowned Him with thorns, crucified Him on a tree. And we would do it again. He said the world hated Him and that it would hate us. And the reason it does not hate us Christians more is not because the world today is more like Christ but because we Christians are so unlike Him.

Man is not on his way up but on his way down. It is ridiculous to ask man to follow Christ so long as he is unsaved. He is a guilty sinner and must be made to face the fact; he must see himself as God sees him. Then will he pray like David, "Against thee only, have I sinned." We must stop dusting off sin with a powder puff and spreading cold cream over the cancers of iniquity. Sin is not mere imperfection, the left-overs of a brute ancestry. Man is not evolving Godward. Left to himself, he is foul, reprobate, degenerate, disgusting, not on his way up to heaven but on his way down to hell.

Certainly the Word of God paints no rosy picture of man in his natural state. Instead, we are told, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it: but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." If it be objected that this is an Old Testament picture of a corrupt nation we turn to the New Testament and find the human race given over by God to "a reprobate mind, to do what ought not to be done. They 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, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although 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. Again, if it be objected that we have made progress since Paul wrote Romans we turn to his description of men in the last days and find that men are no better, that these same characteristics persist and some more are thrown in for good measure. Lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God -- these, mind you, are marks of the human race at the end of its course. Man still is no better. For it is not a progressive race "evolving" upward but a perishing race "deviluting" downward. Of course, that is not what we are reading in popular magazines; it is not what starry-eyed idealists are telling us -- but it is what God says.

Man's teaching makes him think well of himself. God's Word makes him think meanly of himself but well of Jesus Christ. A lady who objected to proofs of her picture on the grounds that they didn't do her justice was told by the photographer, "Lady, what you need is not justice but mercy." That is what man needs and God shows him his just deserts that He may offer him mercy.

So there are two schools of thought with us: that man in his present state is on his way up from the beast or that he is on his way down from the best. If the first is correct he needs only culture; if the second be true he needs Calvary. If the first is correct, he needs only education; if the second, he needs regeneration. If we believe God, man needs Calvary -- and that brings us to the next consideration.

In His dealings with us God works down from above, not up from below. Consider that OUR SAVIOUR CAME DOWN FROM ABOVE. "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven" (I Cor. 15:47). "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). "I am from above" (John 8:23).

Right here is a problem that stumps the evolutionist. If we are evolving upward all the while, why did the perfect Man appear almost two thousand years ago? Why can't we produce a greater character than Jesus Christ? We've had almost twenty centuries since He appeared and we haven't had a man who can say, "Which of you convicts me of sin?"

Jesus Christ was not a step in the upward evolution of man from below. He was an intervention of God from above! Man was ruined and on his way down and couldn't save himself, but God so loved the world that He broke into the course of things and introduced another order of life, a supernatural Christ, His only begotten Son, to rescue man from going down and to lift him up. Jesus Christ was not merely the best man who ever lived, on his way up from below. He was the Son of God come down from heaven to die for our sins and rise again.

In this day when people are asking, "What must I do to succeed?" instead of "What must I do to be saved?" they ask, "Why do we need a Saviour? Aren't we on our way up by science and invention?" Well, we are going places with our heads and hands but we have outrun our hearts. Indeed, we have come from tallow candles to television, but what does man do with his inventions? He goes wild and cuts his own throat with them! Have we not just seen two highly intelligent nations go crazy and wreck the world?

Man's heart is not right. He is on his way down, spiritually, and unless his course is changed he will end down and not up. Only God can change that course. That is why He sent His son from above that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, for perish is exactly what he will do otherwise. Jesus Christ could never save us if He were only a man, even if He were the best man. He had to be another kind of man, the God-man. So God broke in from above. He had to start a new race with a new Adam, for the first race had failed. That new Adam is the Lord from heaven, and to as many as receive Him power is given to become the sons of God, members of a new race on its way up instead of down.

How is this change accomplished? Here again God works from above. "Except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). THE NEW BIRTH IS FROM ABOVE. What man needs is not a boost from below but a birth from above! He doesn't like to be told that he needs a new birth. He tries to cover his sins and excuse his iniquities, but, for all his culture and progress, he is still only a savage with a thin veneer of civilization. He is on his way down and must be born from above. Even religious people find that hard to accept. Our Lord said to Nicodemus, "You are a teacher in Israel and you don't understand these things?" There have been church members, deacons, elders, even preachers and

missionaries, who were very slow to learn it. We argue from the natural, that as the twig is bent so is the tree inclined. We bring in a lot of psychiatric jargon to explain our conduct, but all that is true in our newest findings along that line has been in the Bible all the while. There is a "wisdom that is FROM ABOVE" that brings in a higher law. By the law of gravitation my knife, when I drop it, falls to the floor. But by another law I throw it upward and it sticks to the ceiling. "Ah, but you interfered and did something to it," do I hear you say? Well, we were all headed downward by one law, but when we believe in Christ, God starts us upward by another law! God steps in and does something for us and to us and in us.

That is grace, and the natural man does not like to hear it. He wants to save himself; he does not like to be God's charity patient, coming just as he is without one plea but the shed blood of Christ. He does not like to be told that eternal life is a gift which he can neither earn nor learn. He thinks he is on his way up and needs a boost, but God says he is on the way down and needs a birth!

Finally, THE HEAVENLY CITY COMES DOWN FROM ABOVE. Man has been trying to build heaven on earth for a long time. From the Tower of Babel onward, he has created his paradises and Utopias, all kinds of experiments and projects, but his Babels have all come down in ruins. He is still at it. Years ago, Henry Drummond advanced the idea that the New Jerusalem could be any city, my city, your city, if we but make it so. And so by education, sanitation, ventilation, we strive to create here the perfect city. But God's Word says the New Jerusalem will not be built up from below. In fact, man's final civic masterpiece is described in Revelation. It is Babylon the Great, and it comes to a horrible finish. The terrible eighteenth chapter of the Apocalypse pictures the final chapter in the civic genius of unregenerate humanity. Babylon falls and becomes the habitation of devils, a plagued city full of death and mourning and fire, where the voice of music and industry shall be stilled and where light and joy shall disappear. In this day of atomic bombs, and with the ruins of Berlin and Tokyo fresh among us, it should not be difficult to visualize these fearful scenes. Some who ridiculed the lurid pictures from John on Patmos ought not find them to be so far-fetched now!

But soon after this awful portrayal of Babylon's doom John writes: And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, COMING DOWN FROM GOD OUT OF HEAVEN, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Once again God breaks in from above. We do not build up the Ideal City from below. Of course, we don't like to be told that. Of course, all social reformers and planners and dreamers and experts who have never seen God's blueprints will dismiss them as a lot of apocalyptic wildfire as out of date as the notion that the earth is flat and four-cornered. Now, to be sure, this does not mean that Christians are not to work to make our present cities as decent as possible. We do not expect perfect law and order in this age, but we should co-operate with whatever agencies we do have for maintaining the peace. Nevertheless, we know that unregenerate man cannot build the New Jerusalem. If he could, what would he do with it? They told us a few years ago that the machine age would set us all at leisure to cultivate the finer things. But what does the average man do with leisure when he gets it? He gets drunk or plays bridge or goes to a silly show or sits up half the night reading trash. What would such people do in the New Jerusalem? If the human race in its present state moved into the New Jerusalem today it would be hell by tomorrow!

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people, built by God for the people of God, and it comes down from above for a people born from above by faith in Him who came down from above.

Peter tells us about "the world that was," a world destroyed by water. He tells us that the heavens and earth which exist now are literally stored with fire which will destroy them. Then he tells us, "Nevertheless

we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells." True to his prophecy, scoffers are now among us reminding us that things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. But we have had one world destroyed by water, we are in a world to be destroyed by fire, and we look for a new world, a heavenly city come down from above. Anything else is willful ignorance, as Peter plainly declares.

Thanks be unto God, who works from above. See to it that you have been born from above. Then, "if you be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God."

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