



Spiritual Formation

Genesis 2:7 NIV

...the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

How Do You See Yourself?

The other day I was in a 2nd grade class as a substitute teacher and one of the children came to me and asked if I had an iPhone 11. This was an odd question and I wondered what prompted it. My reply was not exactly an answer. "Why are you wondering?" Her response was surprisingly frank. "Because you look rich." Boy was she off base! Many are just as misinformed regarding spirituality. They have no idea what it is or what to make of it.

The basis of all "spirituality" is not the development of spiritual disciplines or a devout attention to the things of God but is instead the initial formation of humanity. We know that Jesus declared that if the people did not proclaim His glory, the rocks would cry out and that the Psalmist calls for even sea creatures and flying birds to praise the Lord. **Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds...** (Psalm 148:7-10 NIV) Of course, worship of God is not solely the responsibility of human beings, but as far as we can tell, there is a unique bond between God and people that is not seen anywhere else in the created universe.

In Genesis 1:27 we have the much discussed instruction that people uniquely are created in God's own image. **So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** (NIV) Image is the translation of the Hebrew term "zelem", which literally means "something cut out". It is used to describe the gold copies of tumors and mice the Philistines made to try and appease YHWH when a plague of rats and tumors struck them after they captured the Ark of the Covenant. It speaks of the resemblance between something and something else. In some way, more than any other creature, there exists a likeness between God and all humans. We somehow look like God and that is critical to our discussion of what links us to God in a unique way.

Before we return to the nature of humankind, let us look a bit closer at all the other creatures of the world. In Proverbs 12: 10, Solomon uses the Hebrew term, "nephesh behemah" to speak of the "soul of the beast" or as it is translated by the NIV, **A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.** In the Hebrew it reads literally, "knowing, a righteous one, the soul of his creatures". Getting beyond the Hebrew idioms used to contrast the way righteous and unrighteous people think about others, let us consider this idea that the animal has a soul because that is precisely what is said here. If the soul, as we will discuss later, is the union of spirit and body, we must acknowledge that living creatures have their own spirit and are put together as a soul. What that implies is beyond the scope of today's discussion, but it has to be noted there is something greater than mere blood and guts to living

creatures. They are more than just “biological machines”. Righteous people see this in them and do not cruelly mistreat them.

Let’s move to the distinction between human beings and all other living creatures. The humans were “Adam”, which is different than what the other living beings were called, “behemah”. Behemah always describes non-humans and has as its root, “tongue-tied” or “impeded in speech”. Humans are not animals. They may act like them but there is a demarcation between people and all other living species on earth. Something more establishes this clear delineation. When the first person was created by YHWH, it was unique to every other creature and it reveals the marvelous connection between God and humanity. Like the behemah, the beasts, the first person came from the ground. **And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so.** (Genesis 1:24 NIV) ...**the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.** (Genesis 2:7 NIV) That, however, is where the similarity between the two creation events ends. Something fascinating took place with the human that has critical ramifications for all people. After forming his body out of “dirt stuff”, YHWH breathed into the human the breath of life and as a result, became “to a living soul” or “nephesh kayam” as it is literally.

It was not until the LORD breathed into the human body His own breath that the transformation into a living soul transpired. Easily God pulled the beasts out of dirt stuff and they all were alive but only the human needed His breath to make him something more, a living soul. The beasts also have a soul as Solomon has reminded us but this one, this human, was a living soul which seems to be altogether different. Something of God was put in the human, something “breathy”. Consider this interesting detail of both the Hebrew and Greek terms translated spirit. They each have at the root of them wind, or breath. Could it be that God put into the first human spirit, spirit coming out of Him? Whatever we may say of this creation event, we can be certain of this. Humanity has the life of God; the body of earth, but the spirit of YHWH worked within. God’s life made humanity come alive, the first Adam “breathing” God.

It is amazing to consider, and we must give this some time to ponder, each human has the life of God streaming within. It is not just mortal life we possess, earthy life we hold but God-life, Spirit life. Even the most corrupt of us has Him, the most debased and evil have Him there a part of them. What seems so insignificant to masses of the world, the life of a person or two, is within the realm of reality of colossal importance. The creator God of the universe is woven into the fabric of each person we flippantly take so lightly. It is no wonder the Scriptures call us “sons of God”. This is perhaps the most provocative finding we have in Genesis, even in the entire Decalogue. We start with God in us and we are related to Him with as much connectivity as we are linked to our mothers or fathers, our sons and daughters.

Let us move this discussion just one step further. The perverse philosophical paradigm of the industrial age and onward that you are a machine, a biological pumping mechanism that can be figured out using mechanical models is absurd. You are beyond machine, you are living soul, endowed with Godness. You cannot be understood without factoring in the nature of God and His life worked in you. No formula for behavior can be certain without considering God in the equation. More than that, and this is the greatest error coming out of machine theology. You are not a thought in someone’s mind, you are not a program within some computer. You are really real and God’s life in you is the substance of your life being actual, of it existing in time and space. Now we come to what is most critical to our discussion here. What is spirituality?

The foundation of all training in godliness and spirituality is that God is already a part of you. Spirituality is not a matter of doing affirming religious things. It is not connecting with the earthiness of your physical being. Spirituality has never been something practiced within the confines of just this world. It is simply this, the connecting of you and God; without Him, there is no “spirituality”. Because every soul has God a part of

him or her, there is hope for each one to “find God”, to build a life with Him. No one is a hopeless case as long as the breath of God is still there. What point is it to read religious books, do spiritual exercises or engage in mystical activities if you never connect with God? You can connect with Him because you speak His language, you think like He does, you live God at each moment, even if you aren't paying attention to Him, even if you have never given thought to Him. There is no point to writing a sermon, no reason for doing a single thing for your religion if you are not connecting with the actual God who is a part of you! The foundation of every spiritual work or activity is God in you, or as Paul put it, “the hope of glory”.