

THE DIGNITY AND VALUE OF EVERY PERSON

We begin with the assumption that there are two possible foundations of the dignity and value of every person: God's purpose in creation and God's purpose in salvation. For the sake of convenience we will call the first "creation dignity", the second "gospel dignity".

- Creation dignity is the dignity and value of man as the crown of creation. Creation dignity is received in Adam, the image of God
- Gospel dignity is the dignity and value conferred on a person as the addressee of the gospel. Gospel dignity is received in Christ, the image of God

However, "creation dignity" was affected by the Fall, and "gospel dignity" is rejected by large numbers. So we need to study more closely the question in what sense one can nevertheless speak of the dignity and value *of every person*.

CREATION DIGNITY

A) The particular dignity and value of man as crown of creation

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-17

- 1) Whatever the image of God may be (a much disputed question), what does the fact of man's creation in the image of God establish?
- 2) God tells man to do the following: *be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion, be in the garden to work it and keep it, eat of every tree but one*. What does each of these "jobs" say about the dignity and value of (unfallen) man?

B) How does the Fall of man affect his dignity and value?

- 1) What does nakedness (when perceived as such) do to man's sense of dignity and value (*Genesis 2:25; 3:7*)?
- 2) In what sense do the curses on man and woman respectively affect their sense of dignity and value (*Genesis 3:16-19*)?
- 3) "*For the wages of sin is death*" (*Romans 6:23*), and Adam and all his descendants are denied access to the tree of life by the angel of God (*Genesis 3:24*). The early pages of the Bible paint a bleak picture of fallen man's development up to the flood (*Genesis 6:5-8*), and humanity after the flood was no better than before. In what sense do you feel that "original sin" and its consequences (actual sin, sickness, death, hell) question or even negate the dignity and value of man?

C) The ongoing dignity and value of man after his ejection from the garden

- 1) Many feel that since the image of God in man had to be restored in Christ, it must have been lost in the Fall (fully or at least in essence). But it is also clear that in some sense man retained the image of God. What do *Genesis 9:5.6* and *James 3:9* teach regarding the "creation dignity" of every person even after the Fall?
- 2) What does the fact that God made garments for fallen man (*Genesis 3:21*) say about fallen man's ongoing dignity and value? What does the fact that Cain received a protective mark say about his ongoing dignity and value (*Genesis 4:15*)? Cf. also verses like *Matthew 5:45* and *Acts 14:17* describing what is sometimes called "common grace" (as opposed to "special", i.e. saving grace).
- 3) When *Psalms 8:4* asks the question "*What is man ...?*" does this imply a deserved or does it imply a surprising exaltation of man? What do you think is this Psalm's message regarding the dignity and value of (fallen) man?

GOSPEL DIGNITY

A) The dignity and value of a person “in Christ”

1) Christ is the image of God (*2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:13*) and his coming was in order that people might be recreated in his image (*Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:10*). What conclusions would you draw from this regarding the nature of the original image of God? How do the “image of God” in original creation and the “image of Christ” in re-creation relate to each other?

2) Continuing this train of thought: *Psalms 8* speaks of man as such. But in *Hebrews 2:5-8* this passage is quoted and assigned to Jesus. In what sense is the dignity and value taught in *Psalms 8* experienced apart from Christ, in what sense is it experienced fully only “in Christ”?

3) How would you say was “gospel dignity” foreshadowed and experienced in Old Testament times by those in communion with God: Seth, Noah, Abraham, Moses and so on? Cf. passages like *Romans 4:1-12; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5; Hebrews 11*

B) The dignity and value of redeemed man in the everyday life of the people of God

1) Old Testament: Read the following passages from the law of Moses: *Exodus 22:16-23:9; Leviticus 19:9-18; 25:35-55; Deuteronomy 21:10-14; 23:15-16; 24:5-25:4*. What do they have to say on the dignity and value of people within the old covenant?

2) New Testament: Read *Ephesians 4:17-6:19; Colossians 3:1-4:1*. What do they have to say on the dignity and value of people within the new covenant?

C) What does “gospel dignity” mean for those outside of or excluded from the people of God?

1) Old Testament:

a) In what sense would you say that in OT times “gospel dignity” extended to sympathetic outsiders? Cf. passages like *1 Kings 10:1-13* (Queen of Sheba); *2 Kings 5:1-14* (Naaman); *Jonah 1-4* (Nineveh); for these two passages cf. also *Matthew 12:38-42*; and then after the coming of Jesus *Matthew 2:1-12* (visit of the wise men); *Matthew 15:21-28* (the Canaanite woman)

b) In *Malachi 1:2.3* God says: “*I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.*” How does the Old Testament portray the dignity and value of persons who are “on the wrong side”? Answer this question by studying one or two of the following persons: Cain, Ishmael, Esau, Saul, Absalom, Ahab and Jezebel or some other person or group of your choice.

2) New Testament:

a) In what sense does “gospel dignity” extend to those not yet believers but potentially open for the gospel? Cf. passages like *Luke 4:16-19* (the gospel for *the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed*); *Luke 5:27-32* (the gospel for *tax collectors and sinners*); *John 3:1-14* (Nicodemus); *John 4:1-42* (the woman at the well); *John 8:1-11* (the adulteress); *John 17:20* (prayer for future believers); *Acts 18:9-10* (Paul in Corinth).

b) In what sense does “gospel dignity” extend to those who reject the gospel or are even hostile to it? Cf. passages like *Matthew 23:37-39* (lament over Jerusalem); *Mark 10:17-22* (the rich young man); *Matthew 16:1-4; 23:1-36; Luke 11:37-52; John 8:39-47* (Pharisees and Sadducees)

c) In the Gospel of John (in the context of salvation by faith) Jesus says on the one hand that *God so loved the world* (*John 3:16*), on the other hand that he is *not praying for the world* (*John 17:9*). What do you feel this says about “gospel dignity” in the case of those who will permanently refuse to believe?

Wolf Christian Jaeschke

21 April 2003