

Discussion Notes: Reformation Fellowship
Critique of Ordinary Christian's Creed
Handout #6
1-29-2012

Points #3-7 of "The Ordinary Christian's Creed" > My Critique

A. Faulty view of what it means for man to be created in God's image.

1. We are not in his image strictly to the extent that we are capable of person-to-person relationship; we are in his image to the extent that we are persons.
 - a. Define person.
 - i. *A person is what we humans are.*
 - ii. *A human being is made in the image of God; hence, what is distinctively human is what is reflective of God.*
 - iii. *Personhood is ...*
 - (A) capability of moral action;
 - (B) freedom of will;
 - (C) rationality;
 - (D) language ability / communication;
 - (E) etc. (anything that truly distinguishes us humans from mere animals).
2. Being in the IMAGE of God does not entail or require relationship.
 - a. A human being is no less fully human if he is a solitary person.
 - b. Aristotle was right: man is a social animal!
 - i. *But one's essential humanity would not be diminished or destroyed by the lack of others to relate to.*

B. Faulty inference from Creed: man is fulfilled by "imaging God," that is, by existing in relationship with other persons (either God or human).

1. One does not "image God" by being in relationship; but by being a person.
2. Every human being as such is in image of God;
 - a. hence, imaging God cannot be the ultimate fulfillment of a human being, for not all human beings will be fulfilled.

C. Other faulty inferences made from Creed.

1. God's primary agenda for man is to see him live in community (person-to-person relationship).
2. God's primary agenda for man is to see him "experience" an intimate, loving, person-to-person relationship with God.
3. Rather, God's primary agenda is for man to "glorify" God.

D. Faulty view of the nature of God.

1. God is not triune.
2. God does not exist on same level of reality as us.
 - a. God did not create us because he “desired” (or needed) us to love him.
3. God is not capable of creating mankind to be autonomous from him.
4. It is not the structure of the cosmos that determines whether God will reward or punish. (See point 7 of Creed.)
 - a. God does not answer to the “structure of the cosmos.” God only answers to himself.

E. Faulty view of the nature of human freedom and of human action.

1. That God wants uncoerced love is plausible only to the extent that we bring God down to our level of being. If he is a person within the same sphere of being as us, then it makes sense to suggest that he wants freely-given love, not coerced love. But this makes no sense if God is transcendent.
2. Clearly, love directed toward God can be real without being autonomous (as REAL as we are).
 - a. Nothing can be real without God creating it.
 - b. By the same token, no action or choice can be real unless God creates it.

F. Faulty view of the ultimate reward, the ultimate blessing.

1. Not an “eternal relationship of love” between me and God (as that is typically understood).
 - a. For most ordinary Christians this means: an eternal experience of nothing other than loving God and being loved by God.
 - i. *Modern version of “Beatific Vision”*
2. What is the ultimate reward:
 - a. NOT “going to heaven” (in any of its various versions)
 - b. Rather, dwelling in the everlasting Kingdom of God in the age to come on the NEW EARTH
 - c. Various descriptions:
 - i. *Blessing of Abraham*
 - ii. *Eternal Life = Life in the final, coming Age*
 - iii. *Kingdom of God*
 - iv. *Righteousness*
 - v. *Glory*
 - vi. *Honor*
 - vii. *Immortality*

G. Two faulty perspectives that commonly follow from this Creed

1. The focus of Christian discipleship is to learn to live in community. Jesus came to teach us to live in community.
2. The focus of Christian discipleship is to learn to experience an intimate relationship with God. Jesus came to teach us how to have an intimate relationship with God.

H. Critique of first faulty perspective:

1. My purpose is not to create and live in community; my purpose is to personally and individually reflect the GOODNESS of God in my person.
2. This fallacious perspective mistakes the fulfillment of a very real human need and desire (we are “social animals”) for our ultimate fulfillment.

I. Critique of second faulty perspective:

1. My purpose is not to “experience” a relationship with God; my purpose is to personally and individually reflect the GOODNESS of God in my person.
 - a. Man's true reward—his true fulfillment—comes not from “relating” to God; it comes from being like him in the sort of person he is.
 - i. *We find “wholeness” to the extent that we are LIKE God, not to the extent that we are in “union” with God.*
 - b. Arguably, to “relate” to God is a part of my purpose; it is part of being a truly good person.
2. This fallacy mistakes the fulfillment of a very real human need and desire (we long to “feel” loved) for our ultimate fulfillment.
 - a. I could find true and authentic fulfillment without ever “feeling” loved.
 - i. *Fulfillment comes from being loving toward others; not from being loved by others.*
(A) “It is better to give than to receive.”
Some may go their entire lives without ever truly feeling loved. They are not losing out on the purpose of human existence. Fulfillment comes from being loving to others; not from experiencing being loved by others.

J. Both of the above false perspectives are often used as a criterion for judging a church or Christian community.

1. The most important purpose of a church is not to offer community.
 - a. The most important purpose of a church is to offer TRUTH (the truth of the gospel).
 - i. *A mutual commitment to Truth does create community;*
 - ii. *but creating community will not necessarily create a commitment to Truth.*
2. The most important purpose of a church is not to promote an experienced emotional connection to God.
 - a. The most important purpose of a church is to offer TRUTH (the truth of the gospel).