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GENESIS 1:26

THE SCRIPTURE CONCERNED

> And God said, Let us make man IN OUR IMAGE, AFTER OUR LIKENESS: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26 AV)

THE MEANING PEOPLE DRAW FROM THIS TRANSLATION

Many people do not really understand the difference between the expressions "in our image" and "after our likeness".

THE MISUNDERSTANDING

This is NOT a mistranslation of the text, provided we understand what these expressions are intended to mean. What is commonly the case is that these phrases are misunderstood and misinterpreted.

THE SOURCE OF THE DIFFICULTY

God clearly meant TWO DISTINCT AND DIFFERENT THINGS with these two phrases. They were not intended by God to be synonymous.

The first expression is "in our image", a translation of the Hebrew noun "tselem". This word is used 17 times in the Old Testament, and it refers to looks and appearance. It is used to refer to "molten images" (Numbers 33:52), to "the images of the Chaldeans" (Ezekiel 23:14), and the "images in the house of Baal" (2 Chronicles 23:17).

In the Greek language LXX this is translated by the word "eikon", which refer to the physical appearance being similar to what the "eikon" represents.

So with the expression "in our image" God was saying that He would create man to outwardly LOOK LIKE GOD! The outward appearance, though not the composition, would be the same as God's appearance ... a head, a body, two arms, two legs, etc.

The second expression is "after our likeness", a translation of the Hebrew noun "demuth". This word does NOT mean "look like"! Rather, this word refers to "conceptually alike", or "of the same type". This word is used 25 times in the Old Testament, and mostly translated as "likeness". But it is also translated as "LIKE the poison of a serpent" (Psalm 58:4), and as "the noise of a multitude in the mountains LIKE AS of a great people" (Isaiah 13:4), and as "all of them princes to look to, AFTER THE MANNER of the Babylonians" (Ezekiel 23:15).

This word does NOT refer to looks directly, but more to abstract concepts, like characteristics and traits.

In the Greek language LXX this word is translated by the Greek noun "homoiosis", which is also used in the Greek text of James 3:9, in reference to "THE SIMILITUDE of God", another way of saying "in the

likeness of God". The Greek "homoiosis" is a variation of the more often used word "homoioma". James 3:9 tells us that "homoioma" (or "homoiosis") is the correct translation into Greek of the Hebrew word "demuth".

Translating the Hebrew words used in Genesis 1:26 into Greek allows us to compare statements in the Old Testament with statements made in the New Testament.

So where Paul said in Romans 1:23 that the pagans had turned the glory of God into "a homoioma OF an eikon", God tells us in Genesis 1:26 that He made man "in the eikon AND homoioma" of God.

It follows that the Hebrew word translated "after our likeness" ("demuth") in Genesis 1:26 means the same as the New Testament Greek word "homoioma". And "homoioma" in the New Testament clearly refers to ABSTRACT CONCEPTS, rather than to physically similar appearance.

So in Genesis 1:26 God was stating TWO things about man:

1) Man was to be made "in the image of God", which means that human beings have THE SAME OUTWARD APPEARANCE as God, though God is composed of spirit, and we are composed of physical matter.

In addition ...

2) Man was to be made "after the likeness of God", which means that human beings have THE SAME BASIC TRAITS AND (POTENTIAL) CHARACTERISTICS as God, though on a lower level. In other words, man has a brain with a spirit in man to give him identity, a free will, the ability to think and plan ahead like God (though obviously on a lower level), the ability to appreciate value and to recognize responsibility and to make choices. It is THIS factor that contains man's ultimate true potential, rather than the first one.

Understand that of these two things THIS ONE (being created after the likeness of God) is the indispensable one for becoming "the sons of God" in the resurrection. Someone who has (theoretically speaking) ONLY been created "in the image of God" (i.e. basically looking like God) but NOT "after the likeness of God" can NEVER become "a son of God". Only those who have been created "after the likeness of God" have the potential to become one of the God kind.

Thus, for example, if someone were to be created to LOOK like a human being, but without being created "after the likeness of God" (e.g. if scientists were to clone some test-tube human being?), then that individual would NEVER have the potential to become one of the God kind, that individual could NEVER become a son of God.

Now while the second point (being created after the likeness of God) is the indispensable one for becoming the sons of God, the indications are that God will never create anyone "after His own likeness" without ALSO creating them "in His image". Both attributes are essential, but, if anything, the second one is even more important than the first. And that is easily overlooked and frequently not really appreciated.

THE CORRECT TRANSLATION

The translation is basically fine, as long as we appreciate what is meant by the expression "after the likeness of God".

THE MEANING OF THIS CORRECT TRANSLATION

The two statements identify the requirements for ultimately becoming sons of God.

IN SUMMARY

This topic is also covered to some degree in the articles on Romans 1:23 and on Revelation 9:7.

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