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MAN -- HIS NATURE AND DESTINY

TEXT: ...The Spirit and the body is the soul of man; and the resurrection of the body is the redemption of the soul. The elements are eternal; and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receiveth a fullness of joy. ... (Doctrine and Covenants 90:5)

SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 8

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.... When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet; All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth.

What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor.

Man is a curious paradox, a baffling, inscutable enigma. At his best, man is an exalted creature, full of love for his fellow man that makes him sacrifice his own life willingly for an ideal, for his country, for his religion, or to save the life of a friend. He is heroic, he is devoted, he is altruistic, he is noble, he is kind, he is generous, he is wise, he is God-like. He gives generously to great philanthropies; he establishes hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the aged; he sends relief to areas devastated by war, fire, plague, flood, and earthquake; he risks his life to save a stray dog or cat; he spurns the natural law of self-preservation, and puts women and children first into the lifeboats of a sinking vessel.

But at his worst, man shames the animals. He drinks himself into a blind stupor and lies down in the gutter in filth that would shame a pig. As a rule, the animals kill only for food; but men slaughter each other by the thousands and hundreds of thousands to conquer a few square miles of territory, or to claim a tottering and transient throne, or to acquire wealth which they cannot possibly use. At his worst, man is greedy, selfish, lustful, gluttonous, cruel, hateful, deceitful, contentious, indolent, proud, impatient, hard-hearted, and spiritually blind and deaf. What is man? And why and how has he become this baffling and curious paradox?

Man is a dual creature, composed of two parts -- body and spirit. The spirit was created first. It existed first without the body; it survives the death of the body. This is the only satisfactory explanation for the puzzling contradictions in the two creation accounts in the book of Genesis. Chapter one gives the order of creation (after the earth was created) as first, vegetation, then fish, birds, mammals, and lastly man, in ascending order. After this creation, man was given dominion over all the fish of the sea, the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field, and was commanded to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. At this time, man was a conscious, intelligent being, capable of receiving God's

commands, and apparently creation was complete, for at the end of the sixth day, God saw everything that he had made, pronounced it good, and rested from his labors. Yet in Chapter two, verse five, the strange statement is made that there was not a man to till the ground! What had happened to the man created and given dominion in chapter one? Chapter two follows then with a completely different account of creation, in which man is formed of the dust of the ground, and God breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, making him a living soul. Then woman is created, and for their use God plants vegetation in the garden of Eden, then makes mammals, birds and fish, reversing the order of creation given in chapter one by proceeding from higher to lower.

Some Bible scholars have attempted to explain that these are simply two accounts of creation from two different original sources; but that is not a satisfying explanation of why the order of creation should be reversed in the two accounts. I believe that the clue to this mystery is to be found in verses 4 and 5 of chapter two: "There are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth" (therefore there could be no vegetation) "and there was not a man to till the ground." The first creation was a spiritual creation. God made every plant of the field spiritually before it was in the earth, every herb of the field spiritually before it grew physically, every spirit of man spiritually before he created a physical man to till the ground. Then in the second creation, God made physical forms for the various creatures he had first formed spiritually. He formed man's body of the dust of earth, and placed within it the spirit which he had previously created, and man became a living soul.

It was the spirit, and not the body of man that was made in the image of God. Because man is made in his spiritual image, man contains a spark of the divine; he is akin to God; at his best he is capable of associating with God, talking with him, loving him and being loved by him, and living eternally with him.

The spirit of man is the life-giving element. "The body without the spirit is dead," says James. It is the spirit, the intelligence of man, which has dominion over the material elements of the body, and over the earth, and all lower forms of life on the earth. Spirit is the element which gives unity to the body. It determines that the body shall act as one -- that every part shall cooperate with every other part.

The Spirit gives continuity to the body. Why are you the same person today that you were yesterday, or last year, or ten years ago? If thinking and personality stem from and depend solely on the material substances of our brain cells, then our thinking and our personality should change from day to day and from year to year as individual cells die and are replaced by different materials. Yet in the midst of an ever-changing flow of body cells, our personalities are our thought processes remain the same. For the spirit is the conscious, intelligent, rational element of man, that continues unchanged while implemented through a constantly changing body.

The spirit is the part of man that knows, that thinks, that feels, that apprehends. Paul says, (1 Cor. 2:11) "What man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" Job (32:8) says: "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." The wise preacher of Ecclesiastes (12:7) taught that when the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns unto God, who gave it. Zachariah says that the Lord "formeth the spirit of man within him." Jesus taught his disciples not to fear those who could kill only the body, but rather to fear him who had power to destroy both body and

soul, or spirit, in hell. Paul (2 Cor. 5:1) and Peter (2 Peter 1:13) speak of the body as a tabernacle which houses the spirit.

Paul, a Pharisee before he was a Christian, believed (as did the Pharisees) in the existence of a spirit in man which gives him understanding, life, consciousness, unity, continuity, and intelligence. Jesus indicated his belief in such an element in man when he said at the moment of his death, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit;" likewise Stephen as he met death by stoning.

In the beginning, man was innocent. He knew nothing of good and evil, of pain and pleasure, of joy and sorrow. By the fall, Adam, and Eve acquired a knowledge of good and evil; and by their separation from God came to realize something of the consequences of evil. The penalty they paid for this God-like knowledge was death -- not only physical death, or separation of spirit and body, but spiritual death, or separation from the God who had made them a little lower than the angels, and designed them for fellowship with himself.

The consequences of that fall extended to all of Adam's posterity -- to the entire human race. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) Each man finds in his own body -- in his human nature -- the seeds and the desires of sin. Each man feels the effects and suffers the results of sin, because for each of us there comes a gradual weakening of our physical powers, and eventually -- sooner or later -- a time when we must confess temporary defeat, and give up dominion over our material bodies, laying them down in death.

The lost and fallen nature of man is no figment of someone's religiously motivated imagination. Each of us, if he is honest with himself, recognizes the things in his own nature which would drag him down, and confesses the many times when he has yielded to those downward-pulling forces. But each should also recognize the upward pull of his spiritual nature -- the part of him that is created in the image of God, which is in conflict with the natural man.

Out of this conflict grow the paradoxical and enigmatic characteristics of man. Spiritually, he is still a little lower than the angels, created for fellowship with God. Naturally, or physically, he is carnal, sensual, devilish. He is constantly at warfare with himself; "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." (Gal. 5:17) "The natural man is an enemy to God, and has been, from the fall of Adam, and will be for ever and ever." In this natural state, man is a lost and fallen creature; he is in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity, contrary to the nature of God and of happiness. He is a stranger to God -- in rebellion against him -- direly in need of salvation, but not in the least desirous of having it.

The God who had created man gladly assumed some of the responsibility for his fall, although it was man's own choice which brought about his fall. A God of love could not sit idly by and see man irrevocably lost, without doing something about it. He sent his Son into the world that through him men who felt the upward surges of their better nature might choose life and redemption and salvation. Christ died to redeem man. The spirit and the body is the soul of man; and the resurrection from the dead -- the restoration of spirit to body -- is the redemption of the soul. Spirit and element, inseparably connected, receiveth a fullness of joy; and when spirit and body are separated, they cannot receive a fullness of joy.

Through Christ's redemption, man - if he chooses -- may be restored to the Presence of God; he may dwell there in fellowship with his Creator through eternity. If he is willing to accept this redemption, if he yields to the enticings of the

Holy Spirit, and puts off the natural man; if he is born again, and becomes as a little child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, and full of love, his nature is changed, and he becomes a child of God and an heir of God's kingdom.

The natural man is depraved, but not totally or hopelessly depraved. The redemption of Christ restores him to God's presence, if he will choose to accept that redemption. Infants who die while they are still too young in years or in accountability to choose, are covered by that redemption; for Christ has declared that "of such is the kingdom of heaven," and that their angels do always behold the face of the Father, who is in heaven. Man's nature is a conflict of good and evil; but his destiny, if he will make the choice, is to receive again his lost dominion, and to live with God through eternity.

Once upon a time Luther Burbank, who had lifted many a weed to the status of a useful plant, and made many a humble wild flower a thing of magnificent beauty, said: "If I have made any worthy contribution to the world, it is ----- that a plant born a weed does not have to remain a weed, or that a plant degenerated by conditions of Nature does not have to remain degenerate." Someone asked him whether this principle also applied to human nature, and his answer was "Yes". Thanks to God, and the redemption provided through his Son Jesus Christ, man does not have to remain a degenerate, a rebellious outcast from his Creator, a being stripped of dominion even over his own body, but may resume the place for which he was designed by creation -- a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor, having dominion over himself, and over all the works of Nature by which he is surrounded, as the Creator intended.