

IMAGINATION

“Imagination”

Introduction

Our imagination may be the most tangible remnant of what Watchman Nee terms “the latent power of the soul.” Man’s ability and propensity to dream, desire, and invent is one of the main things that separates him from the animals. Imagination is powerful and can have great consequences for good and for evil.

Dale Sides classified imagination’s place in our thought life in this manner: “imagination is to our souls what revelation is to our spirits.” This is a powerful statement. Revelation comes from a higher source. It comes from the Spirit of God to the spirit of man. In similar manner, though we principally register our imaginations in our mind, they are birthed from the desires of the heart. They have their origin in the heart of man and are then played upon the mind of man. It is in this way that imagination is the revelation of the spirit of man to the soul of man.

We want to take a look at imagination: its functioning before the fall, its corruption after the fall, and God’s command regarding our imagination.

I. Imagination Before the Fall

Genesis 2:19

And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. KJV¹

The Lord brought to animals to Adam to see what he would name them. He left the naming up to Adam. He was curious as to how man would classify the creatures of His creation. What an awesome privilege! The Lord made them all but left it up to man to name them.

What did Adam have to exercise to name all these animals? He had to use his imagination. To define something requires creativity.² Adam had to observe these animals and exercise his mind to give them names that best expressed their form, character, and qualities. When we consider that the Lord had created these animals to be communicative symbols of His eternal covenant, the job He handed to man was no small risk or responsibility.

Adam had to work his mind. Though imaginations are birthed in the heart, they are formed in the mind. What the shaping of a clay pot in the potter’s hand is in the physical, imagination is in the mental. If you can’t see it, how can you fabricate it? Every physical implement we have, from shoes to space shuttles, is the end result of an imaginative process. Before things are made with the hand, they are formed in the mind.

Genesis 2:20

¹ All references are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

² Whenever ascribing creativity to man, we mean “inventiveness,” not the creative power of God to make something out of nothing.

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

Adam classified every living creature. I don't know that there is anyone alive today that knows by heart the name of every genus of animal on planet earth, let alone that could come up with a new name for all of them. As it is, many times scientist Latinize their own names and use it to name a new creature they have discovered. Adam didn't do this. He named all the animals—and he did it in less than a day.

I share this section of Scripture to show what kind of man Adam was before the fall. His naming of the animals was an exhibition of great mental prowess. And it not only shows his mental faculties, it also illustrates his authoritative position. Adam classified the animals. They didn't define him. He, as ruler of the Earth, called forth their identities. This is a truth we should bear in mind if ever we are attacked by wild beasts or scared by a neighborhood dog. As born again saints, we have been placed in the body of Christ. Even the soles of His feet are above every creature. We have been restored to a place of dominion and thus have right to exercise authority over the animals.

Adam also understood human relations, being one of the first involved in one. He knew how to reach a woman's heart.

Genesis 2:22-23

22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

*He told her, "You are me, my bones and my flesh." It wasn't "I want to be with you" or even "You are part of me." No, he recognized that she was of his very essence. Up till then, he had been the crowning achievement of God's creation. He recognized none of himself in the animals. He didn't give them his name. But he was man, 'iysh in Hebrew. She would be woman, 'iyshshah, from man. He gave her the greatest compliment he could by naming her from himself. And the Lord called **them** Adam (Gen 5:2). It wasn't his name. It wasn't her name. It was **their** name.*

Genesis 2:5-8

5 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, and there was not a man to till the ground.

6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

The size of this garden was quite extensive. Adam was able to tend it without breaking a bead, without sweat. This was man before the fall. In intelligence, he could name all the

animals in a day. In his physical energy, he could tend the whole garden without exertion. Spiritually, he walked with God in the cool of the day.

Genesis 2:15

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

Man was formed outside of the garden and was brought into the garden by grace. The entire earth wasn't a paradise at this time. Only a certain section was. What marked the difference between garden and wild? Cultivation. God called plants into being (Gen 1:11-12). This was the wild. He then planted a garden eastward in Eden. This is cultivation. And man was placed in the garden to keep that cultivation and extend it—advance the kingdom of God—over all the earth.

II. Imagination After the Fall

Genesis 3:4-5

4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Here is the root of every vain imagination of man: idolatry. Making anything God but God is the root of all wicked thought. A mental life devoid of God and His Law is one given over to vain imaginations. This can be applied to any inventive and artistic work of man. Any art that represents things that are contrary to the word of God is a vain imagination.

Consider the literary genre of fantasy. Question, what is the difference between fantasy literature and the mythology of false religions? Not much. What marks fantasy out as fantasy is the element of magic. This takes form either through characters with supernatural powers or implements (i.e., rings, swords, wands, etc.) with supernatural powers. How does this power operate in the story? Does it bring glory to the One True God or is it an end in itself? It isn't good enough that the power may be used for good against power that is being utilized for evil. The real question is whether the power works in accordance to the laws of God and does it bring glory to Him? More often than not, the power brings glory to the hero or to itself. Frequently, the power is impersonal. This isn't a representation of the true nature of power. Spiritual power is always personal because it always emanates from spiritual beings—not things.

A quick study of Scripture on imagination will show that idolatry is the king of vain imaginations. Its promise is power without price. "You shall be as gods." It is power that fuels the passion of imagination. What is the desire? Is it for a particular relationship (power over a person), a position (power over an organization), wealth (power of provision)? The list goes on. Vain imaginations tend to paint us as the central characters in the drama of the universe. This place is the domain of God alone. Anyone or anything else is a pretender to the throne.

What was the affect of the fall on the imagination of man? We need look no further than the changing of the woman's name.

Genesis 3:20

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

In current colloquialism, Adam renamed her, "My babies' mama." This is quite a change from her original designation of "bone of my bones." I don't believe that Adam's knowledge suffered much from the fall. As a matter of fact, we are told that he actually had an increase in knowledge. He now experientially knew the difference between good and evil. What suffered most, I believe, was his understanding. Knowing something and understanding it are two different things entirely. One can understand and not know as well as know and not understand.

Understanding is more a function of the heart, whereas knowing is more a function of the mind. Their understanding was darkened. Prior to the fall, Adam had an enlightened understanding and named his wife woman. After the fall, he had knowledge and named her "My babies' mama." In the new name we see his new image of her, not as his essence primarily but as the bearer of his progeny. As noble as motherhood is, any husband who sees his wife primarily as the mother of his children and not as the other side of his very self is going to have problems.

Genesis 3:23

Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

Man had been placed in Paradise to till its ground. The ground of Eden had been prepared by God. It was ground that could be tended without striving. He is now removed to till the ground from whence he was taken, the very dust from which he was made and to which he would return (Gen 1:19). The Hebrew word for "till" in verse 23 is often translated "serve" and indicates servitude and bondage. Adam's flesh was made of dust and after the fall he was made the servant of the flesh.

That being said, man was made in the image of God. God is the creator. It is part of our nature to be creative. One of the things that distinguishes man from animals is our propensity to fabricate. Birds build nests and men build homes, but birds don't wire their homes for electricity or hang art work on their walls. Man makes and our making is directed by our imagination.

Genesis 3:24

So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

What follows is a bit of conjecture on my part. The sword doesn't appear again in Scripture until Genesis 27:40 and then it does so in a way that indicates that the sword was well known. How did men learn how to make swords? The first one man saw was in the angels' hand. This spiritual vision was the birth of an idea that eventually was manufactured.

Adam was kept out of the garden by a flaming sword. He was sent to till the ground. In Scripture, there is a strong connection between plows and swords (see Joel 3:10; I Sam 13:19-21; and Micah 4:3). Did he see the sword and begin to wonder if it would work to open the ground? I don't know. But we do know that Cain was a tiller of the ground and the manner in which he killed his brother caused Abel to bleed. Was Cain the first to beat his plowshare into a sword? We don't know, but history is full of farm implements becoming weapons of war.

Cain brought a curse upon himself through his crime. The outworking of this curse—the ground's unwillingness to bear fruit for him—resulted in the birth of the humaities.

Genesis 4:16-17

16 And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

17 And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.

Cain developed urbanization, city making. Though evil exists everywhere, its most horrendous manifestations take place in cities.

Genesis 4:19-20

19 And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.

20 And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle.

Cain's progeny also began the first mobile home industry, tent making.

Genesis 4:21

And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.

Musical instruments had their birth through Cain's line. Does this make harps and organs evil? Hardly. Wickedness or holiness are more to be determined by an instrument's use than its design.

Genesis 4:22

And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every **artificer**^a in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Heavy metal, brass and iron, now come into play. I believe this manufacture wasn't just tools, but images as well. The term "artificer" leads us to some interesting insights.

*Strong's definition*³ -

OT:2794 **חֹרֶשׁ** **choresh**^α (kho-rashe'); active participle of OT:2790; a fabricator or mechanic:

³ BibleSoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 BibleSoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.

KJV - artificer. (Used of Hiram of Tyre, a “worker” in brass – see 1 Kings 7:14ff.)

OT:2790 שָׂרַשׁ **charash**^β (khaw-rash'); a primitive root; to scratch, i.e. (by implication) to engrave, plough; hence (from the use of tools) to fabricate (of any material); figuratively, to devise (in a bad sense); hence (from the idea of secrecy) to be silent, to let alone; hence (by implication) to be deaf (as an accompaniment of dumbness): KJV - altogether, cease, conceal, be deaf, devise, ear, graven, imagine, leave off speaking, hold peace, plow (-er, man), be quiet, rest, practise secretly, keep silence, be silent, speak not a word, be still, hold tongue, worker.

Prov 12:20

Deceit is in the heart of them that **imagine**^β evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.

Prov 14:22

Do they not err that **devise**^β evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that **devise**^β good.

To be an artificer, one must be able to imagine. This imagination can be good or evil. It is interesting to me that this word can mean imagine, engrave, and plow. When we imagine, we are engraving images in our mind and plowing it up to plant seed. Good seed bears good fruit. Evil seeds bear a wicked crop.

Cities, tents, musical instruments, and tools and art of brass and iron had not been known to man before. Where did it all come from?

Hebrews 11:3

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

This verse is speaking of the creation. It means that the reality we see is composed of a deeper reality that we cannot see. But it also shows us that the origin of the physical realm was spiritual. Inventions are birthed in the spirit realm first and then are brought forth through the manufacture of man.

In Genesis 6, we see calamity strike mankind. A group of angels abandoned their first estate and took human wives. Knowledge that man had not been privy to now became widely available. And the end result was devastating to the heart of God.

Genesis 6:5-6

5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

The Lord made man for His companionship. Have you ever heard a news report of some wicked deed that turned your stomach and made you heartsick? Imagine having to listen to

the thoughts of humankind and hearing nothing but wickedness and evil plots. No wonder it says that “it grieved Him at His heart.”

The Lord had to wipe the planet clean. But it didn't stop man from being imaginative.

III. The Command of God

Genesis 11:6

And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

“Nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.” From the mouth of the Lord comes the testimony of the power of man's imagination. With it, we have sent men to the Moon and plumbed the depths of the oceans. We have developed startling life-saving technologies as well as weapons that can destroy all life on the planet. It is God that designed it to work that way. It is why He wants our imagination.

Matthew 22:37-38

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

The word in the Greek translated “mind” in verse 37 is dianoia. It signifies the working of the mind or the heart. It means to reason out, think it through, meditate—in other words, to imagine. God wants us to love Him with all of our imagination because nothing will be restrained from us which we imagine to do.