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**We Are Matter and Spirit**

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One of the things that makes life so difficult for humans is the fact that we must operate in two different realities. Of course, ultimate reality includes both, but our personal experience as eternal spiritual persons who live in temporal material bodies makes us have to function different ways as we live life.

As Christians, our primary focus should be on eternal, spiritual things, not on things that are temporal and material. After all, what goes on in this world is so transitory. In the grand scheme of things, even our own physical lives are just an eye blink.

But while our core essence is spirit, we are housed in temporal material bodies and live on a physical earth. For instance, as we look at what is going on in our own society, and even throughout the rest of the world, it is impossible to ignore such things as war, hatred, racial tension, inflation, disease, and so many other evils that are easily identifiable. Along with that, there are the many internal struggles and temptations that we face – things such as anger, lust, greed, hunger for power, and others. We are, after all, material creatures, and what goes on in the world and in our own bodies affects us in some very profound ways.

**Facts of Life**

As Christians, as we think about these things based on a biblical worldview, there are six facts that we need to be aware of:

**Fact 1 - We Are Both Spiritual and Physical Creatures**

Human beings are different from all other living creatures on earth in that we have both a spiritual

and physical part. All other creatures only have the physical part.

Our physical bodies connect us to the material world. We have organs that operate within our bodies to keep us physically alive and functioning. We have neural pathways that pass information back and forth throughout our bodies. And we are affected by various stimuli from outside of ourselves.

But humans are special in that we also have a spiritual component. It is this spiritual part that makes us persons. When God created man, He put in us elements of His own personhood. We have the unique ability to engage self-conscious personal relationships, and to make independent decisions about how we will live our lives. No other living thing on earth has that capability.

**Fact 2 - God Created Material Reality for a Purpose**

When God created the natural universe, he did not just do it on some random whim. He had a purpose in mind, and the purpose specifically centered on his desire to create human beings – persons made "in his image." To make human beings the kind of creatures he envisioned – spiritual beings housed in a material body – required a material environment for them to live in. So, he created the natural universe and carved out a particular place where this creature could live – planet earth.

But the purpose of it all was for mankind. He created man as a person capable of engaging Him in an intentional, self-conscious personal relationship.

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### **Fact 3 - God's Purpose Has Priority over Human Purpose**

Because of the nature of our temporal existence, we human beings have to pay attention to our physical environment. Part of that attention is a matter of dealing with survival needs. We need food, clothing, and shelter just to survive physically, so we have to spend time and effort to make sure those needs are taken care of. But since we are self-conscious, free-will creatures, we have an ability to think and act beyond those survival needs. We can dream and create for a better life. And to make that better life, human beings have created various societal institutions and the infrastructure to make them work.

Because our physical lives are such an intrinsic part of our daily existence, it is very easy to get so focused on them that we ignore the spiritual part. In fact, many people get so wrapped up in work, hobbies, politics, entertainment, human relationships (of all kinds), and other elements of our physical existence that they totally ignore the spiritual element altogether.

The problem with that is, in the grand scheme of things, it is the eternal spiritual part that is of ultimate importance. It takes a lot of personal effort to make sure that we have our priorities in the right order.

### **Fact 4 - God Has Made Us Stewards over the Physical**

Perhaps you have heard it said that some people become "so spiritually minded that they are of no earthly good." What that points to is that even though the spiritual part of our existence is the most important, the physical part can't be simply set aside. God created us to be spiritual creatures housed in physical bodies, and we must pay attention to both parts. We just have to do it in a way that corresponds to God's purposes.

Through His revelation to us, God has given us knowledge about what that should look like. Additionally, He has given us the opportunity to partner with Him to carry out His purposes in the world. That is, He has appointed us as stewards (managers) to take care of the physical world He created. We engage this through how we manage physical resources, engage politics, and even by how we interact with other human beings.

### **Fact 5 - Man Is Fallen and Seeks to Impose Personal Priorities**

Sadly, we don't tend to be very good at stewarding God's creation. It can only be done well when we understand and follow His revealed instructions to us. We have the revelation, but we also have an inner nature that makes us tend to promote our own personal wants and desires above God's purposes. When Adam and Eve sinned, that sin nature entered humanity and has been passed down to succeeding generations ever since.

### **Fact 6 - The Societal Environment Affects Both God's Work in the World and Man's Ability to Effectively Steward**

Because of the existence of our sin nature, we have ended up with a society that is all messed up. While there are some who work diligently to promote God's ways and His purposes, the great majority of people in the world focus more on personal desires and priorities. This hinders the work of God in the world as people create an environment that makes it more difficult for God's ultimate purpose for mankind to be accomplished. This also makes it more difficult for those who wish to promote God's purposes to do that work.

### **Playing with the Facts**

As people express their personal desires in the world, those desires end up coalescing around a concrete set of principles. If those principles are based on God's revelation, societies

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end up being structured in ways that promote what is good. If those principles are based on a different philosophical base, an entirely different structure is created and the results are bad.

### ***Based on Biblical Principles***

American society was originally built upon biblical principles, and its underlying structure reflects that. This does not mean that the people who established that structure (or who appreciate it now) were necessarily Christians, but it does mean that they recognized the value of the particular kind of result those principles provided.

It is simply a fact that biblical principles provide a good societal environment that not only reflects God's priorities, but also creates an environment that provides a possibility for the best life for those living in it. Some of the most important of those principles include:

#### ***1. An Objective Authority Source***

From a spiritual perspective, that authority source is the Bible. It is seen as God's revelation of Himself and His ways to mankind. That authority source is considered to be the final word that defines who God is and what He is like, as well as for defining right and wrong morality.

From a human perspective, the concept of an objective authority source is represented by the Constitution. While that document is not authoritative in the same sense as the Bible, it is considered to be the final word regarding the law of the land. By having that kind of objective authority source, there is no doubt as to what is permissible and impermissible in society – which provides a source of order necessary for a stable society.

#### ***2. Proper Hermeneutics for Interpreting the Authority Source***

From a spiritual perspective, the Bible is seen to represent the actual

structure of reality, and legitimate interpretations of the text are based on what is actually written in the text. The source is recognized to be God Himself, and it is not permissible for individuals to read their own meaning into it.

From a human perspective, the concept of original intent represents proper interpretive methodology. The intent of any given law as it was written must be taken into account when being interpreted. That is the only legitimate interpretive framework. It is not permitted for later interpreters to assign different meanings.

#### ***3. Priority of the Individual***

God made man in a way that put the priority on the individual. People enter into relationship with Him based on a personal decision to do so, and are individually responsible for how they respond to Him. They are also individually responsible for how they act in response to the beliefs and values God has revealed in Scripture.

In human society, this plays out in the way that people act in their daily lives. People are not looked on as part of some group (or collective) but as individuals. Thus, when some wrong is committed, it is the individual who committed the wrong who is accountable for it.

#### ***4. Equality under the Law***

God, as revealed in Scripture, is no respecter of persons. Every person is judged according to their personal and individual response to that revelation.

That principle plays out in human society as individuals are judged based on their adherence to the law of the land. Things such as social, economic, or political status do not come into play when making judgments regarding an individual's adherence to the law.

## *5. Equality of Opportunity*

In the Bible, God is revealed to be one who is no respecter of persons. So when it comes to a relationship with Him, people who come from various kinds of privileged human situations have no more opportunity to know and follow Him than those in lesser human situations.

In human society, this plays out in the idea of equality of opportunity. While human beings tend to have a hard time implementing this principle in reality, it is still considered to be the ideal. What that means is that one's social, economic, or political status does not determine what opportunities an individual may pursue. While those factors may make it easier or more difficult for some individuals to pursue opportunities they wish to strive for, no one is prevented from striving because of them.

### ***Based on Marxist Principles***

In more recent times, a different set of principles have become increasingly prominent – principles based on Marxist philosophy. Marxist principles are, at their core, atheistic. Thus, there is no spiritual basis for them. They are purely secular in conception and implementation. As opposed to the principles based on biblical notions that have a spiritual side, these only have human based results. Some of the most important of these principles include:

#### *1. Subjective Authority Source*

As the concept of objective authority is not recognized to exist, there is no choice but to base the authority for society on a subjective source. By default, that source must be the person (or persons) who is able to acquire the necessary power to attain a position of authority. It is that person's opinion that determines how things will be. If the authority source changes, due to death, public opinion, or a power play by someone else, the new authority's opinion becomes the new norm.

#### *2. Relativistic Interpretation of Laws*

Again, as there is considered to be no such thing as an objective authority, the interpretation of rules and laws is determined by the one(s) in power. As such, the interpretation of written laws (even a constitution) is not considered to be ultimately authoritative. Those in power have the ability to interpret it based on their own opinions and preferences. Laws are not considered to be "true" based on the intent of the writers, but are thought of as "living documents" that can be interpreted based on the opinions of the authority source.

#### *3. Priority of the Collective*

In Marxist philosophy, atheistic beliefs are the foundational underpinning. Since there is considered to be no creator God, human life, by default, had to come into existence by naturalistic evolution. That being the case, there is no kind of objective purpose for mankind's existence, or meaning for individual life. The primary purpose for mankind (indeed all life), then, becomes mere survival. Based on this philosophy, it is considered that individual needs and wants are secondary to those of the collective. If individuals have to be sacrificed for the good of the collective, that is considered good and right.

#### *4. Rule of Man*

It is acknowledged that for the survival of the species (the collective) to be attained, there must be some kind of system to guide the collective and maintain order. And once again, as no objective laws or rules exist, the source of that order must be centered in those who hold power. In fact, the very idea of "equality under the law," in many circumstances, can be judged to be a bad thing if it is deemed that favoring the individual harms the collective. And since there is no compelling reason for the law itself (or even justice in general) to be blind, it is considered proper that those in power become the arbiters of right and wrong.

#### *5. Equality of Outcome*

It is considered, based on Marxist philosophy, that the best way to provide for the survival of the collective is to make sure that every person's basic needs are accommodated. Their way of accomplishing that goal is to promote equality of outcome (as opposed to equality of opportunity) – that is, those who accumulate more should give up some of what they have and it be given to those who have less. This is done by various means of income redistribution.

## What this All Means

So why all of this explanation about the differences between Christian Theism and Marxism? It is important because both are fighting against each other for dominance in society, and one will ultimately win. And whichever one wins will be the default environment that we must live in. One of them represents actual reality will provide a societal foundation that truly does promote order and fulfillment in people's lives. The other one doesn't, and will ultimately provide only poverty and disorder.

The truth is, the teachings of the Bible actually do represent reality. And it is only when those teachings become the guiding principles of individual life and of society, that the elements of matter and spirit line up in a way that promotes the fulfillment of God's ultimate purpose.

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