

Session 5
Coram Deo: Before the Face of God

TABLE TALK

1. What is the difference between a Christian plumber and a non-Christian plumber?
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

2. What percentage of LCC's ministry takes place within the wall of LCC? Have we confused the training program with the battle field? _____%

I. A Question of Worldview.

A worldview is a mental grid composed of basic assumptions about life. Most of these assumptions are unexamined and taken for granted (the sun will rise tomorrow, love is better than hate, adultery disqualifies a person for the presidency, etc.). Like a **pair of glasses**, we see and interpret all of life through this worldview though we are seldom even conscious that the glasses are sitting on our nose! If our worldview is wrong, then all of life will by definition be out of focus.

Many in our world today have, at least in part, a **dualistic** worldview. Rather than seeing all of life as a unified whole operating under the sovereign reign of God, dualism allows us to **compartmentalize** our lives.

A. Philosophical Dualism.

The Greek philosopher Plato (c. 428-348 BC) set the stage for much philosophical dualism when he described the material world around us as a **shadow** of the spiritual world (the real world). His allegory of the cave helps to understand his thought better. Prisoners in a cave see shadows on the wall projected by a fire behind them. Understandably they begin to think that the shadows are the reality, not realizing that the real forms are unseen behind their backs. Plato's point was that the realm of Ideas was the real world and the material world around us is merely its shadow. The real world (universals) cannot be perceived by our five human senses but only by **minds** (reason). Therefore, the human body and all that is part of this physical world (including work) was of secondary importance. Some responded with **asceticism** (discipline the body, deprive the body, treat the body as evil) while other responded with **hedonism** (devotion to pleasure; eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die). What matters is the "other" world. In some cases, dualism (especially, some forms of Gnosticism) taught that the physical world was inherently evil. In other cases, it was considered unreal (an illusion, maya).

B. “Evangelical Gnosticism.”

Unfortunately, elements of Gnostic dualism have crept into the **theology** and **practice** of the Church. At times this has expressed itself in movements and theologies (monasticism, mysticism, charismania, etc.). But more frequently, it creeps into our faith in more subtle ways encouraging us to compartmentalize our lives:

Secular activities	Sacred activities
Laity	Clergy
The physical world	The spiritual world
Works	Faith
Head	Heart
Facts	Values

- *Today one could describe the dualism – the split between the spiritual and the physical or worldly – that exists within evangelical Protestantism as “evangelical Gnosticism.” This is especially true where we see Christians emphasizing “spiritual activities (e.g., prayer meetings or Bible studies) or “professional” ministry or missions as the one truly satisfactory way to faithfully live out our Christian lives. Similarly, we are showing a Gnostic orientation whenever we demean things of the physical world or see them as unimportant (e.g., the environment, government, art, justice, or public health), or see work in fields that deal with them as a less-than-full Christian calling. (Miller, p. 18)*
- *We have abandoned the powerful and integrative biblical worldview and exchanged it for an anemic, dualistic worldview of evangelical Gnosticism. This worldview has reduced our vision to simply going to church and going to heaven. We have lost the powerful vision to which Christ has called us. (Miller, p. 319)*
- *Separating the sacred from the secular is a recipe for disaster when it comes to thinking about the relationship between faith and work. This is because work is typically assumed to be in the secular category, and the questions of the relationship of one’s work to one’s faith is left hanging, or worse, we assume there is no connection. This becomes especially problematic for people who take a “once saved, always saved” position, assuming that once a person is saved, her behavior and work really don’t affect her salvation one way or another. (Witherington, p. 129)*
- *The problem with this secular/sacred dualism is that it does exactly what Plato did so many years ago: It identifies sin with some PART of creation (dancing, movies, tobacco, makeup). Spirituality is defined as avoiding that part of creation, while spending as much time as possible in another part (church, Christian School, Bible study groups). This explains why work in the spiritual realm as a pastor or missionary is regarded as more important or valuable than being a banker or businessman. (Pearcey, p. 83)*
- *Though in theory Evangelicals and Fundamentalists believe God is sovereign in all of life, in practice their traditions of pietism actually reinforce this dualism. All of this has resulted in a peculiar approach to faith and vocation. For generations of faithful Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, vocation in the secular world was at best a necessary evil. To the extent that work had “kingdom significance,” it was a platform for evangelism. The mark of true piety for a committed believer whether in skilled or manual labor or in the realms of*

business, law, education, public policy, and social welfare, was to lead a Bible study and evangelize their associates in their place of work. In this paradigm, work was instrumentalized – it was regarded as simply a means to a spiritual end. (Hunter, pp. 248f.)

II. *Coram Deo.*

The Biblical worldview, however, simply will not allow us to compartmentalize our lives. Jesus is **Lord of all**. There is no corner or this universe, there is no time period in our calendar, and there is no aspect of our person over which Christ does not assert his sovereignty! Everything we are and all that we do is lived out under the watchful eyes of God. Christians in an earlier generation spoke of this reality by using the Latin phrase *coram Deo* (*Deo* = God)(*cora* = the pupil of the eye). The basic idea was that God knows everything about me. Nothing is hidden. I live my entire life **in the presence of God** (before his face).

Coram Deo captures the essence of the Christian life.... To live coram Deo is to live one's entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.... To live all of life coram Deo is to live a life of integrity. It is a life of wholeness that finds its unity and coherency in the majesty of God.... The Christian who compartmentalizes his or her life into two sections of the religious and the nonreligious has failed to grasp the big idea.... This means that if a person fulfills his or her vocation as a steelmaker, attorney, or homemaker coram Deo, then that person is acting every bit as religiously as a soul-winning evangelist who fulfills his vocation.... It is a life in which all that is done is done as to the Lord. (R. C. Sproul. Feb. 23, 2009. Ligonier Ministries Blog).

A. Face Book.

The God we worship has a **face!** Because we are created in his image, we have one too! Nothing comes closer to expressing the relationship that God desires to have with his creatures than the notion that he longs to be **face-to-face** with us. Just as an infant, as soon as his eyes are open, begins to fixate of the face of his mother.... Just as lovers long to be face-to-face (not just shoulder-to-shoulder)... so God longs for intimacy with us. Though in one sense, no one can see God's face and live (see Exodus 33:18-23), in another sense, the whole **purpose** of salvation is a face-to-face relationship with God.

1. After Hagar was cast out by Sarah, the angel of the Lord came to her and comforted her. *Hagar called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are- the-God-Who-Sees (El Roi); for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" (Gen. 16:13. NKJV).*
2. After his all-night wrestling match with God, Jacob *called the name of the place Peniel (Hebrew, the face of God), saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." (Gen. 32:30).*
3. When Aaron blessed God's people, he used this benediction: *The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance (face) upon you and give you peace. (Num. 6:24-26).*
4. *You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me." (Psalm 27-8-9).*

5. *If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (II Chron. 7:14).*
6. *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (I Cor. 13:12).*
7. *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (II Cor. 4:6).*
8. *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. (I Pet. 3:12).*
9. When John saw the Holy City of God, with the redeemed worshiping the Lamb seated on the throne of God, he writes: *They will see his face.... (Rev. 22:4).*

SUMMARY: God is **personal** and wants to live in an intimate, face-to-face relationship with us. Our lives on earth are an opportunity to live *coram Deo* now so that when we reach the Kingdom of God we can live *coram Deo* there!

B. So.... What is man?

If God has a face, and if I am created in his image, this means that I too have a face. I am personal, as God is personal. Just as God in his triune existence is hard-wired for **relationships**, I am too. Face to face relationships is the whole point of human existence.

Non-biblical attempts to “explain” mankind and the meaning of our human existence inevitably result in a definition of man that diminishes the beauty of the Biblical portrait. They **dehumanize** the human and **depersonalize** the person. There are four basic non-Christian models propounded today for understanding who man is and why he is here:

1. We are here **by chance**. There is no meaning to our existence.
2. We are **machines**. Our behaviors are programmed by DNA. Freedom is an illusion.
3. We are **animals**. The only difference between man and monkey is evolutionary development.
4. We are **gods**. We are part of the Divine Reality and the Divine Reality is part of us (pantheism). Ironically, pantheistic cultures that claim everyone is part of the Divine, are often the worst perpetrators of human injustice (the caste system in India).

Man is neither angel nor beast, and it is unfortunately the case that anyone trying to act the angel acts the beast. (Pascal, Pensee #678).

SUMMARY: Without the light of God’s revealed truth (the Bible), the best we can ever hope for are informed **guesses** about the truth of who we truly are. Like the blind men investigating the elephant, each of us will never see more than a small portion of the reality.

C. In the image of God.

Beyond the fact we have a “face,” the image of God means that we are endowed with other traits and characteristics that cause us to reflect the likeness of our Creator, at least to some degree. What is this image and how are we to understand it?

1. Even without opening the Bible, basic observation makes it clear that humans are different from animals in several important respects.

- **Walks erect.**
- **Wears clothing.**
- **Language.**
- **Tool maker (opposable thumb).**
- **Worship.**
- **Man studies the animals (not vice versa).**
- **Reason, thought, imagination.**

*Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed. There is no need for the whole universe to take up arms to crush him: a vapor, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But even if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because he knows that he is dying and the advantage the universe has over him. The universe knows none of this. Thus all our dignity consists in thought.... (Blaise Pascal. *Pensees*. #200.).*

2. The story of creation in the Bible highlights other ways that man is different from the animals.

- Adam and Eve were created last, as if they were **the pinnacle** of creation, as if all of creation was prepared just for them!
- Man is the only creature:
 - Fashioned by **the hand of God** (all others were spoken into existence).
 - Into whom God **breathed the breath of life.**
 - That talks and walks with God.
 - Made in the image of God.
 - Given a command to have **dominion** over the earth.

3. In summary, there seem to be three primary aspects of the image of God:

a. The **structural** aspect. What I am. A person.

God has put within humans certain components (hardware) that he did not put in other creatures (animals) and which reflect who God is: reason, creativity, morality, will, personality, personhood, language, etc.

- b. The **functional** aspect. What I do. Work.

Humans have a purpose, a function that was not given to other creatures, notably to rule and have dominion over all creation.

- c. The **relational** aspect. How I relate to others. Community.

God is one yet three (a tri-unity). Because we are created in his image, this means it is “not good to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). We are made for relationships. We have faces! (See C.S. Lewis’ novel; *Till We Have Faces*.)

TABLE TALK

1. Have you discovered vestiges of “Evangelical Gnosticism” (Dualism) in your own doctrine and practice? In the lives of Christians around you?
2. What did you learn about “the face”?
3. What did you learn about “the image of God”?
4. If our theology (our view of God) is wrong then our anthropology (our view of ourselves) will be wrong. And if our anthropology is wrong then our lives (our view of work, family, relationships, pleasures, death, etc.) will be wrong. Discuss.

III. The Model Human: Jesus.

Imagine the difference it would make if you were as aware of God’s face **at work on Monday** as you were at church on Sunday! What difference would it make?

Jesus was the Second Adam, the perfect man, our ultimate model. How did he live? How did he walk? James Davison Hunter (pp. 187-193) notes that there were at least four characteristics evident in the daily life of Jesus that gave him “social power” or “relational power.” These elements were present not only when Jesus was preaching, teaching, healing or dying on the cross... they were manifest in the social relationships (family, neighborhood, work, enemies, etc.) of Jesus’ **daily life**.

A. Jesus’ power was derived from his complete **intimacy with** and **submission to** his Father.

- *Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise (John 5:19).*
- *I can do nothing of my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 5:30).*

Think of the many ways in Jesus' daily life that we see evidence of this intimacy and submission to the Father. If we are daily living in face-to-face intimacy with God, should not our lives also reflect these realities to those around us?

- **Resisted temptation.**
- **Made decisions.**
- **Chose his friends.**
- **Used power.**
- **Responded to suffering and injustice.**
- **Loved and served those around him.**

B. Jesus rejected **status** and **reputation** and the **privilege** that accompanies them.

When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he clearly understood the indignity of the act. He knew such an action meant a loss of social standing and reputation. But because he knew *that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God* (John 13:3), he was able to live out of an **identity** that was not defined by his social surroundings!

As the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus certainly had power, position, reputation, perks, and privileges! But he gave it all up! Why? For the well-being of others! For the redemption of the world! Amazingly, Paul wants us to live with this same kind of mindset! The **cross** defines not only Jesus' life and mission, but ours! When Jesus told us to take up our cross daily and follow him (Luke 9:23)... he meant it!

³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing (emptied himself), taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:3-8).

C. All of Jesus' activities, relationships and interactions were defined by **compassion and love**. Jesus did not operate out of the love of power, but rather out of the power of love.

Jesus did not come to be served but rather to serve (Mark 10:45). In his acts of service, Jesus never made the others feel demeaned nor the object of his piety. His compassion toward others was never self-conscious, manipulative or **self-serving**. It was obvious to all who observed him, that Jesus' actions were genuinely motivated by love for others. When Jesus commanded his followers to love their neighbors, they had a ready illustration of what such love would look like.

If Jesus ever showed "partiality" or had a "bias" it was for the social outcast. And yet the Kingdom he came to offer was freely and without prejudice made available to everyone: men, women, young, old, servant, master, slave, freeman, Jew, Samaritan, Gentile.

- D. When dealing with persons outside the community of faith, Jesus' influence on them was always noncoercive, never **manipulative**.

He never used his power in a coercive manner. When James and John wanted God to punish a Samaritan village for their rejection of Christ, Jesus rebuked them sharply (Luke 9:51-56). Violence, revenge, bribes, manipulation, threats and coercion are never legitimate means for bringing about the purposes of God. Even in his dealing with the Roman rulers and soldiers who carried out his execution, his actions and words were always tender and full of blessing.

SUMMARY: Jesus not only told us how to live, he showed us. His life is a model that we are intended to follow (Mark 1:17; Matt. 16:24; I Peter 2:21). To live for Christ at work obviously involves much more than putting a fish emblem on my car or leaving a few evangelistic tracts in the restroom. Our **walk** must match our **talk**.

IV. Living *coram Deo* at work.

Is it really possible to walk as Jesus walked? Can my life, in my work and in my relationships, reflect the glory of God in all that I am and all that I do? Can I really live *coram Deo* in my workplace this week? Perhaps the answer to that question can be found as we answer the following:

- A. Am I **fully surrendered** to the will and purposes of God for my life?

It is unrealistic to think we can experience the face of God at work, if our choices have resulted in a life outside the will of God. No one will find God's will for their lives until **everything** is on the altar of sacrifice.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom. 12:1-2. NIV).

- B. Can I genuinely do my work for **the glory of God**?

There are some forms of work that God simply cannot bless: abortionist, prostitution, etc. There are other forms of work that are highly questionable: selling or making alcohol or tobacco, the gambling industry, marketing raunchy or pornographic entertainment, etc. Prayerfully ask yourself:

- Is God glorified by what I do at work?
- Are people genuinely served and helped by what I do? Or are they exploited?

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (I Cor. 10:31).

- C. What is my **motivation**?

Why do I work? This may not be an easy question to answer. In fact, it may take courage to arrive at the truth. Here are some questions that may help to unveil the answer.

- Am I motivated by: Desire for status? Greed? Boredom? Fear? Guilt? Ambition? Conformity to societal expectations? Need to provide for my family? A drive to “prove” something? Etc.
- Or am I motivated by: A sense of divine calling? A desire to serve others? A joy in using my God-given gifts and talents? Etc.

D. For whom am I working? Who am I trying to please? Who’s my real **boss**?

To slaves (!) working in every imaginable circumstance in the first century Roman Empire, Paul wrote some amazing words:

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Col. 3: 23-24).

E. What quality of work am I producing? Is my work done with **excellence**?

If God is our true “boss” then he is the one who will ultimately **examine our work**. If God were conducting our “Annual Review” (job evaluation), what would he say? Here are some questions to ask: Am I giving optimum performance? Is my work done with excellence or just enough to “get by.” Are my unseen labors done with the same level of excellence as those which are visible to others (Those who carved statues in Gothic cathedrals used as much excellence on the hidden portions that no one would ever see as they did on the visible portions. *Coram Deo!*)

F. Is my life at work characterized by **moral integrity**?

Am I honest in my expense report? Time sheets? Conversations with clients? Have I abused privileges with company equipment, property, time? Is my language and humor reflective of the God I serve? Am I punctual? When I make a promise, do I keep it?

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. (II Tim. 2:20-21).

G. How are my **relationships**?

Few things are a more accurate indicator of the way we live *coram Deo* at work than how we interact with those around us? Do we know their names? Do we look them in the eye (face) when we interact with them? Do we ask personal questions? Do we look for ways to show those around us that we care about them and value them as persons? Do we show favoritism? Prejudice?

In the book *Servant Leadership* (pp. 9f.), Robert Greenleaf tells the following story written by a woman named JoAnn C. Jones.

During my second year of nursing school, our professor gave us a quiz. I breezed through the questions until I read the last one: “What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?” Surely this was a joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Before the class

ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our grade. “Absolutely,” the professor said. “In your careers, you will meet many people – all are significant. They deserve your attention and care. Even if all you do is smile and say hello.” I have never forgotten that lesson. I learned her name was Dorothy.

H. Am I finding appropriate places to **name the Name**?

Though we have placed this last, in many ways it is the most important ingredient of all to living life *coram Deo*. Though my actions and attitudes are certainly important, unless I name the Name (Jesus), other may think I am just a decent moral individual. A Buddhist, perhaps. Or a Mormon. **Tim Tebow** is not just a silent witness who seeks to live out his profession with decency and moral integrity. He makes a conscious and intentional point of naming the Name.

Kent Humphreys (pp. 123-125) suggests a list of practical ideas for men at work to find ways to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Ideas for ministering in the marketplace that can be used by anyone:

1. **Care** – Use lunches as a time to build relationships with fellow employees and business associates.
2. **Encouragement** – Send birthday or anniversary cards to fellow associates. They could have a Christian message or verse. Add a short handwritten message...
3. **Comfort** – Use times of crisis (illness, divorce, death, etc.) to share the comfort of Christ. Send a card. Visit a hospital.
4. **Hospitality** – Invite fellow workers to your home for recreation, dinner, and fellowship. Take them to a sporting event.
5. **Fellowship** – Lead a group Bible study before work or over lunch.
6. **Thanksgiving** – Use simple thank-you notes to show appreciation to another person for specific acts....
7. **Joy** – Be positive, use clean language, and don't allow yourself to be part of any negative, critical, or judgmental talk. Be a bridge builder. Share times of joy at births, marriages, or graduations
8. **Patience** – Ask God to give you a special spirit to deal with times of crisis and pressure. Others will see the difference in your life.
9. **Concern** – Listen to a friend who is having difficulties with a child. Loan that person a book about raising children, discipline, or whatever you think might be appropriate.
10. **Evangelism** – Let your supervisor, vendors, customers, and fellow associates know that you practice biblical principles in the marketplace. This gives an opening to share your faith.

11. **Prayer** – Offer to pray for an associate who shares a problem with you. Put it on a 3X5 card to remind yourself. Pray for the person... Check back in a few days or weeks for an update.
12. **Travel** – When traveling with associates, you have great opportunities to talk about important things in life.
13. **Listening** – Listen first to the Holy Spirit for guidance and then to the people around you.

TABLE TALK

1. Name three things that, with God’s help, you intend to do so that *coram Deo* becomes a reality in your place of work:
 - a. _____.
 - b. _____.
 - c. _____.

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