

Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.

God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

Genesis 6:11-12

A BRUTISH DEVOTION

ONE ADVANTAGE to working at home is a greater freedom with lunchtime habits. In the familiar surroundings of the home—as opposed to the office, the grease rack in the local garage, the construction site downtown—one can partake of comforts generally only to others evening

erally only to after their quitting time. I like to watch old movies during my daily lunch period (it usually takes most of a week to

finish one film). I have a particular fondness for the movies from the 1930s—those glamorous black-and-white escapes from what was for many a desperate time.

Recently I finished, for the umpteenth time, the original (sound) Tarzan movie, *Tarzan the Ape Man*, with Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan, made in 1932. The old film, made in a thoroughly different era, is of course replete with racial stereotypes and bigotry, and a form of opaque, gentlemanly courtesy toward the fairer sex that long ago went out of fashion. So in the context of the film it is almost refreshing when the un-“civilized” Tarzan treats the delicate Jane with such casual brutishness. He picks her up under one arm like a raggedy doll and carries her off through the jungle heights, leaping from tree to tree. Wishing her to sleep in his den,

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he simply drags her inside; in the morning, he just as unceremoniously drags her back out. When Tarzan sees dinner walking by, he just leaps down from his perch and starts fighting. And when he wants to emphasize a point to his new friend Jane, he punches her in the shoulder with a blow that surely leaves a bruise—and that would just as surely get him fired from any modern workplace. His thoughts are instinctive, his actions are coarse and unreasoned.

Long ago, in the mists of an eternity fallen man cannot comprehend, back when the members of the Godhead were already ancient, they determined by a wisdom known only to them that, first, they would create man, second, man would rebel against the Creator and, third, fallen man would be rescued by the same God against whom he had rebelled. And through it all, by God's standards, man would remain a brute.

It is only natural that man would think himself *not* a brute, but civilized. After all, humans are essentially myopic and self-centered, thinking themselves to be the center of the known universe—and probably the center even of that which is unknown. But humans conveniently forget that standards are set by the creator—not by that which is created. A statue does not set the rules of its own existence. Those rules are set by the sculptor.

Man is not the pinnacle. Man must look up just to see the pinnacle, far off and glorious.

So no matter how refined, or sophisticated, or civilized we think ourselves to be, in comparison to God we are no better than Tarzan dragging Jane around by the hair.

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God,"
They are corrupt, and have committed
abominable injustice;
There is no one who does good.
God has looked down from heaven upon

the sons of men
To see if there is anyone who understands,
Who seeks after God.
Every one of them has turned aside;
together they have become corrupt;
There is no one who does good, not even
one.

Psalms 53:1-3

In the 1932 movie, the "civilized" characters are supposedly Jane's father, the ivory merchant James Parker, and his gun-happy sidekick, Harry Holt. But they're the ones who go around shooting at anything that



moves, heaping racist scorn on the lowly natives, and generally thinking themselves superior to anything and everyone else. If that is our standard for civilized behavior, we are in trouble.

As, indeed, we are.

Whenever we think ourselves superior, we only accentuate our brutish behavior. And whenever we think ourselves superior to God, we become utter fools. This side of the Pearly Gates man will never cease being a Tarzan-like brute in comparison to God. But, happily, God's standard is available to us by another way. What we are unable to attain on our own, we can easily attain through the blood of Christ.

God knows we are uncivilized. Early on, when the members of the Godhead were mapping out this jumbled mess called humanity, they knew that the man they would create would be a brute in comparison to themselves. They knew that his eventual rebellion against God would be a sign of his inherent brutishness. And they knew that man's salvation would need to come from the Godhead itself even *while* his brutish nature was in place. They knew that man would never be able to rise above that base nature on his own. Someone would have to do it for him.

It is a fine line. The believer—the brute saved by grace—is not to revel in his base nature. He is not to wear it as a badge of honor. But he also is not to think more of himself than he is. God saves the lowly; He did it by sending His own Son in a demoted state and killing Him in a most hideous, brutish way. But He also did it by lifting Him out of the grave, by promoting Him from flesh back to His native glorified state.

There will come a day—a grand, unimaginably glorious day—when we, too, will be clothed no longer in our native flesh, but in Christ's glorified state. We will at last know blissful freedom from this confining flesh. We will at last be truly civilized—a standard set by the Sculptor of our creation Himself. Until then ours will be, by definition, a brutish devotion. Our worship will be imperfect, and sometimes base. At times, we will even revert to a diluted form of our father Adam's rebellion, offering no devotion at all.

But, for the believer, none of it will dissuade our Maker from loving us. For *His* native state is grace.

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

