



In the Image of God

Genesis 1:1-27-31

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*** This original sermon was not written by A.I.*

We are continuing in the first four chapters of the book of Genesis in our series, titled, “The Beginning.” This morning we’re looking at the end of Genesis chapter 1. This is God’s creation of humans. The 6th day is the pinnacle of God’s creative activity. The surrounding days, including the seventh day, provide the context in which humans exist. In fact, it’s the sixth day that provides meaning and purpose to all of God’s creation. Think about that.

Suppose God did not create beings who were in his own image on the sixth day. Suppose instead, he created a box of chocolates on the sixth day. Forrest Gump would be happy and might feel vindicated. While pondering life, Gump said, “life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re gonna get.” Gump’s take on life is that it’s unpredictable and random. Mind you, that is life apart from relationship with God, which is indeed unpredictable and random. If God created a box of chocolates on the sixth day, then life on earth would just be a random and unpredictable mess without any real meaning or purpose. I might have offended all of you chocolate lovers, but I’m sorry, life is not all about chocolate!

It is God’s creation of human beings made *in his own image* that gives purpose and meaning to his creation— and the key part is “made in his own image.” Without beings made in his own image, creation lacks power and punch. Human beings in God’s creation are like the crescendo of a chorus in your favorite song— take out the chorus and the song loses its power and punch. A well-written song is built around a climactic chorus. When you get to the chorus, everything just seems to lock into place and you sit back and say, “yeah... that’s what it’s all about.”

Humans were the climax of God’s creative activity in those seven days. God may have blessed the seventh day and made it holy, but he didn’t create anything on the seventh day, and he didn’t call his creation ‘very good’ until after he made humans. Human beings turned God’s creation from good to very good. We need to adjust our thinking to that because current culture bombards us with false understandings that humans are bad for the planet. Some even elevate animals to a higher status than humans, and that kind of thinking is not only ungodly, but it is dangerous. The earth, and I would say the whole universe, was created for humans, but not just for humans alone. That would be too human-centric. Rather, God created the earth and universe as a place for humans to live in relationship with him. Without humans living in relationship with God, creation becomes random and unpredictable and without real meaning and purpose. It is humans made in the image of God and living in relationship with him that brings meaning and purpose to the earth and the whole universe.

Let’s look at the Scripture for this morning. I invite you to open to Genesis 1:27-31. I’ll read from the NIV.

Genesis 1:27-31:

27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ge 1:27–31.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Let’s pray.

As the crowning creature of his creation, God made humankind in his own image. I’m going to talk about being made in the image of God for most of this sermon, but first I want to talk about the last phrase in verse 27. There it says, “male and female he created them.”

Now, there are two implications in this phrase— one is regarding gender, the other is regarding equality. Later in the series we will dive further into God’s creation of the woman as a suitable helper to the man— really what that means is compatibility in companionship and sexuality. So, I’ll just touch briefly on that right now.

Genesis helps us understand that God created two genders— male and female. Now, I am very aware that some in our culture have redefined gender to differentiate it from biological sex, and I know they have a strong conviction that there are more than two genders. There is a lot of chaos and confusion today for some people on exactly how to define a person’s gender. If you are someone who has been searching for understanding about gender or about your own gender, I want to invite you into clarity. Will you open your heart to what God declared when he made humans?

“Male and female he created them…” This lets us know with all certainty that there are two genders— any confusion from there is not born of God. According to God, gender and sex line up. God created two sexes, two genders, and humans created the rest. That simple truth is incredibly freeing because it eliminates guessing. You don’t have wonder about yourself; you can stand firm on the truth that you are either a male or a female. As a male or female, you can know that you have an inherent design that God has gifted you with. You can seek the Lord to find out how your unique design, as a male or female,

may be best lived out. I can guarantee to you that if you seek the Lord about your gender, he will help you discover your unique design. Even if you were born with a biological divergence or have a medical condition, let the Lord God help you to understand your wiring— he is the one who made you.

I know it is a sensitive topic for some, and I want to be as sensitive about it as I can while remaining true to biblical conviction. There is no judgment and no condemnation— If you are dissatisfied with your body, I invite you to bring that dissatisfaction to the Lord. Tune out whatever the culture is trying to lead you to believe— you’re only going to find confusion there. Come to the Lord where there is simple clarity. God has designed you a certain way and you will find your meaning and purpose through a relationship with the Lord. Come to clarity!

The second implication about God creating male and female is about equality. This verse makes it quite clear that God created both male and female in his image. You might have heard some Christians say that the man was created in the image of God and the woman in the image of man. This is an unbiblical stance. That teaching is born out of a misinterpretation of 1 Cor. 11:7 that says, “a man ought to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.”

This very first-century culture-laced passage acknowledges that the woman was made from the man as a compatible companion to the man. Women can radiate with shining glory like a bright star in the sky through companionship with men. Likewise, the men are made to shine through companionship with women. An acknowledgment of woman made from man is there, but there is no suggestion that the woman is made in the image of man and not in the image of God.

On the contrary, a couple verses later in that same Corinthian passage, Paul says, “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.” In other words, both man and woman are of equal status and substance, and both are made in the image of God. Both shine with glory when either are in relationship with God.

Clearly, roles and responsibilities between the two genders differ. A man’s body is clearly designed differently than a woman’s body. However, differences do not equal inferiority. No Christian should think that a woman is inferior to a man. Our women in the church should be deeply valued by our men, and our men in the church should be equally valued by our women. Why? Because God created both male and female in his own image. Both male and female were made to reflect the glory of God together.

That brings us to the image of God. Male and female were created in the image of God. There are a myriad of interpretations out there about what it means to be made in the image of God. I don’t think any of the interpretations can make an exclusive claim to the definition. I think just about all of the interpretations carry some truth to them. Truthfully, if you can define exactly what it means to be created in the image of God, then you can define exactly what it means to be human. That is probably why there are so many interpretations.

On the extreme, some take the word ‘image’ literally and say that God has arms, hands, legs, and feet exactly like we do. Others temper that idea down a little bit and say that if God was to come into this world, he would look like one of us. Well, that’s what happened when Jesus, the Son of God came into the world. Scripture says he was the express image of the invisible God... and he looked just like us! I think that hits on part of what it means to be made in the image of God in the sense that there is a kinship connection— we will recognize God when we see him as if he is one of us. Or rather, as if we were a part of his family.

However, I don’t think being made in the image of God necessitates humanity’s basic physical form. In other words, God might have made humans with three arms instead of two, and they would still be made in the image of God. In fact, we can very confidently say that persons born with deformities and divergencies are still very much made in the image of God. In fact, some might even say that those born with a physical or mental divergence show the image of God in its purest form. I agree with that.

In trying to define being made in the image of God, some point to the differences between animals and humans and say that the image of God is in humanity’s ability to communicate and plan through various language mediums. Others point to the morality, rationality, and self-awareness of humans. Some see the capacity to relate with God on a spiritual level as the image of God. In fact, I’ve heard some teachings say that humans have a spirit and animals don’t, and that is the difference between being made in the image of God and not. Well, on the contrary, the Bible seems to clarify that animals do indeed have a spirit. Ecclesiastes 3:21 says, “who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?” While the question asked is one of uncertainty regarding the destination of the spirit of either upon death, there can be no doubt the author affirms that both humans and animals possess spirits. All of these may touch partly on what it means to be made in the image of God, but they are deficient in themselves if not altogether wrong.

To more fully understand this, I think it’s helpful to first look at the original word, “image” in Hebrew. This word is צֶלֶם (Tselem); it literally means, “statue,” or “idol.” It’s interesting that this word is *the same word* used for idol in the OT. It’s a bit of a plot twist because in the first commandment, God said, “you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol...” Here we see that God himself made an ‘idol’ in his own image when he made male and female.

So, I think having an idol does more than dishonor God— it dishonors humanity itself because it tarnishes the sacred relationship with God that humans are made to enjoy. God is the only one who can make an idol, and he made us for a sacred purpose when he made us in his image. God didn’t make us to worship us. Unlike humans who fashion deaf and dumb idols to be worshiped by other humans, God gave breath to his replica and made it to worship him and reflect his glory.

Another aspect we can find in the “statue” or “idol” is representation. God created humans in his image to represent him in his creation. Idols represent the gods they are fashioned after, and statues represent the persons. These creations are all meant to remind of the glory, splendor, and might of the one they represent. Much in the same way, being

made in the image of God means that we were created to reflect and remind of the glory, splendor, and might of our Creator. When someone sees us, they should see a glimpse of God—a glimpse of his glory, a glimpse of his wonder, a glimpse of his beauty, a glimpse of his might, a glimpse of his love and gentleness, grace, and mercy, strength and humility. I could keep going with those adjectives!

To go with that, I've heard some use the word "vice-regents." We are God's "vice-regents" on the earth—in other words, we are created in the image of God to carry out the rule and reign of God on the earth. In verse 28, God created humans to rule over the fish, birds, and animals, and subdue the earth. I think this is a function of being made in the image of God. We are made to rule over the earth with the authority, creativity, wisdom, benevolence, and the power of God. If humans were to truly carry out their purpose as "vice-regents" for God on the earth, I'm certain the peace of God would reign and the whole earth would flourish as it was meant to.

So, being made in the image of God means we are made to represent God on the earth and reflect his glory. There is one more aspect I want to finish with. Being made in the image of God is about relationship. Many OT scholars would contend that humans were made in the image of God as "his counterpart [who] can have a history with God."¹ In this sense, we were made for relationship with God to become his counterpart on the earth with an ongoing relationship with him. In a sense, our lives are meant to be a journey with God, or a story that God writes. All of human history is meant to be a documented journey with God. This fits well with the idea of being his representatives, but it introduces an aspect of intimate relationship.

In the garden, when God first created Adam and Eve, that open, intimate relationship was available to them. We'll see in the next chapter how God would customarily, I believe, walk in the garden in the evening of each day to be with Adam and Eve. They had a special access to Father God that was lost when sin entered. Today, we have a restored relationship with Father God through our relationship with Christ, who is the image of the invisible God.

Col. 1:15 says, "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created." A few verses later it says, "once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation..." So, it is in Christ where we see the untainted image of God, and it is through Christ that the image of God is cleared up and revealed in us.

My friends, returning to the image of God, which was blurred in us by sin, simply means coming to a relationship with Christ. As such, the image of God is primarily about communing with God. Through Christ, we are brought into the Triune family of God in an intimate, unbreakable bond of love. In the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Spirit are

¹ Atkinson, David. *The Message of Genesis 1–11: The Dawn of Creation*. Edited by J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball. The Bible Speaks Today. England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990.

eternally bound together in the bond of love, and we have been invited into that bond of love as his children. Children who belong. Amen.

Let's pray.

Observation

1. According to Genesis 1:27, how does the text describe the creation of humanity? What is repeated for emphasis?
2. How does the passage describe the relationship between humans and the rest of creation?
3. What specific instructions and blessings does God give to humans in verses 28-30?

Interpretation

1. What does the Hebrew word *tselem* (image, the same word used for “idol”) teach us about what it means to be created in God’s image?
2. The sermon described humanity as the “climax” or “crescendo” of God’s creation. Why is this significant for how we view ourselves and the world?
3. The sermon explained that being made in God’s image is about being God’s representatives or “statues” on earth. In practical terms, what does it look like to reflect God’s character and authority in daily life?
4. What does it mean that both male and female are created in God’s image? How does this shape our understanding of gender and equality?

Application

1. In what ways has our culture misunderstood humanity’s place in creation?
2. In a culture that is often confused about gender and value, how can you personally affirm the goodness and clarity of God’s design for male and female? Are there ways you can honor and value both men and women more intentionally in your relationships, workplace, or church?
3. The idea of being God’s “statue” or representative is a big responsibility. Think about your daily life—at work, at home, in your neighborhood. Where do you find it hardest to reflect God’s character? What is one specific way you could better represent God this week?
4. The image of God is restored in us through Christ. If you are a follower of Jesus, how has your relationship with Him changed the way you see yourself? If you’re still exploring faith, what questions do you have about finding your identity and purpose in Christ?
5. The sermon talked about living in relationship with God as our true purpose. What helps you feel close to God in your daily life? Are there any practices or habits you want to start (or restart) to grow in intimacy with Him?