

## UNDERSTANDING MAN, Part 2 1-15-17

### *Man's Unique Purpose*

We are in week two of our series entitled "Understanding Man." Last week we looked at the origin of man and found that man is a special creation of God. Genesis 1:26 tells us that and more. So, let's read there as we begin **26-31**

*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; 30 and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. 31 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

The father of a 16 year old sent his son out to buy pizza for dinner. He gave his son a \$20 bill and a \$5 off coupon for the pizza. The boy returns in 20 minutes with the pizza and he gives his dad \$8 in change and the coupon. The dad asks, "Why didn't you use the coupon?" And the son says, "I didn't need it, you gave me enough money." Oh my! One of the trials of parenthood. But there you had a young man who did not understand the money-saving purpose of the coupon, did he? And his misunderstanding led to waste. In the same way, tragically, there are millions, indeed billions of lives that are wasted due to a misunderstanding of the purpose of human life. In recent years, our culture has come to realize the importance of having clear purpose for what we are doing. Businesses are urged to develop purpose statements, expressing why they exist. Management experts believe these are important for motivation and efficiency. And in the church as well the word "purpose" has become a major theme. Rick Warren has become famous for his books, *The Purpose Driven Church* and *The Purpose Driven Life*. "Purpose" is a hot topic. Everyone agrees that in whatever you are about it is critical to grasp your purpose. So, what do you think is the purpose of man? Why did God make humans? Put more practically, what is your purpose in life, your reason for being? What do you say? Lucy asked Charlie Brown that question and ole' Charles said, "We're here to make others happy." Lucy then asked the logical question, "What are the others for?" I mean, here's Adam alone in the garden going, "What's it all about Alfie?" Do you say, "Adam, you are here to help others." That can't be the answer. What is the

answer? I wish I could communicate the drama in the question. The question of purpose is central to living. This is ultimate. This determines everything, but how often do you talk about it or think about it? Do you even have an answer? Most people do not. Most try not to sit still or be quiet long enough to even ask it. That's why I loved this one mid-term exam a friend of mine had in college. Early Modern Philosophy mid-term: one question: *What is life? Be specific; use illustrations and examples.* Isn't that a great question? What's **your** answer? What is the purpose of my existence? Over 400 years ago theologians gathered in London to systematically set forth the doctrines of the Bible. From the document they developed, called the *Westminster Confession of Faith* a series of questions and answers were drawn to aid Christians in learning biblical doctrine. This is called a catechism. Question #1 in our catechism is well known, and interestingly it addresses the question of purpose. The question as they put it asks: "*What is the chief end of man?*" The answer: *The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.* If you are looking for an answer to adopt - that's not bad. My answer today does not disagree with that but states it a little differently. Really I'm going a step further and asking, "How do you glorify God?"

The answer to these great questions is taught throughout the Bible but the heart of the matter is found right here in our text. What did God have in mind when He created man in the first place? 26 *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness ... 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him.* This is the emphasis of God's creation of man and answers the question of our purpose. We are made to be the image of God, i.e. our purpose (listen now), our purpose is to reflect God's image, God's character and God's nature. Now Scripture does teach, I think, that our purpose is to glorify God. Ephesians 1 states that our lives are to result in God's glory, but when I look at Ephesians 1 it says that we glorify God by being holy and blameless, or by being like God, you see. Our purpose is to worship, praise, and glorify God. Amen. I add on what the Bible teaches and what you know is true - "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Imitation is the sincerest form of worship."

So then, man's purpose is to reflect God's image. That is why God made man in His image. But what does **that** mean? What is God's image? We know it is not physical. John 4 says God is a spirit. He is not confined to a body. So what is the image of God? The Scriptures don't tell us everything about that, but there may be several elements: intelligence and rationality could be one, our social nature another, our creativity another. The list could go on, but practically we must ask, "How can I reflect God's image?" And the Lord gives us two answers to that. One is taught in

Genesis 1 and relates to what we must **do** that is God- like. The other is taught in the New Testament and relates to what we must **be** that is God-like.

We reflect God's image in two ways: the first way is by subduing the earth. Look at our text. One of the ways man reflects God is by His dominion over the earth. God is a King, and man too was made to be a King 28 *God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.* This verse is often called the *creation mandate*, or the *cultural mandate*. The first part says, "Be fruitful and multiply." A few years ago my wife went to the graduation services at a local college and told me that the speaker they had attributed all of our planet's problems to humans; and the root cause for our problems was - guess what? Overpopulation. I thought the overpopulation myth had died in the 70s but I guess I was wrong. We have lots of problems, but overpopulation is not one of them – not in our culture. Interestingly, this speaker quoted the creation mandate but claimed that God said to be fruitful and multiply **before** He created man. Figure that one out. God made man and God said, "Be fruitful and multiply" and that is still good for us today. Now, you know I sometimes have to admonish us for not obeying God's word, so it is only fair that I say, "Congratulation, this is one command that we, in our church, have done pretty good with." I haven't preached much on this, but we have taken seriously our biological multiplication. The fruits of obedience are all around us, and we are blessed.

But the crux of God's order in verse 28 is found in the words *subdue* and *rule*. Man is given the animal world and then in verses 30 and 31 the plant world to subdue and rule. Speaking of mankind Psalm 8:6-8 (NLT) *You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority— 7 the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, 8 the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.* This is our kingdom, and, as little kings, we are to reflect God's benevolent sovereignty over the universe. This creation mandate puts in our care, and under our rule, all the animals and all the plants. They are given to us for our use, to bless us. And we are given to them, to care for them. Recently someone looked at me and said, "You know what the oldest profession in the world is don't you?" I said, "Of course, it's gardening." That's not what he had in mind but Adam was put in the garden to rule it, and part of ruling it meant caring for it. This is man's dominion which reflects God's dominion.

How is man doing at his job? Terrible! Has man subdued the animals? Only in a tiny way. In many ways the animals rule us and you don't have to watch movies like *Jaws* or *the Birds* or

Jurassic Park to see examples of this. What was the big health scare of last summer? Remember the Zika virus? Carried by a mosquito – little, tiny mosquito that was out of control and deadly.

Genesis 2:**8** *The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.* Now try to picture in your mind - Eden. Isn't it great? **9a** *Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food.* Beautiful! What is it? A garden. Now picture a jungle. What's the difference? They are both full of life - what's the difference. One is ordered and controlled - the other is chaotic and uncontrolled. God put man in a garden. The jungle is a post-Fall phenomena. And how do we describe *our* world? It's a jungle out there! What we mean is that it's out of control. It's wild and dangerous for a man. And that is what has happened to our world due to sin. It's a jungle where plants and animals are out of control, or it's a desert where they've disappeared, and both are hazardous to your health. That's not how it's supposed to be. Ever talk to someone and you ask, "How ya doin'?" "Fine under the circumstances." "How's the family?" "Fine, under the circumstances." "How's business?" "Fine under the circumstances." Everything, you see, is **under** the circumstances. That's the way most folks live. They are victims, not doers. They are controlled not controllers. They live life under the pile. They are subdued. God says to be subduers.

Are you in control? Taking control? Not in a proud way, but in a biblical way. Or are you controlled? By your body, by others, by circumstances, by people, plants or animals? I think one good way to see how fouled up our world is may be to look at how man has become a slave to plants. What do I mean? I'm not thinking of the time and money you give to lawn care. I'm thinking of how the surgeon General says the tobacco plant killed 350,000 Americans last year. Corn, barley, rye and grapes hold 20 million in alcoholic bondage. How many die, how much suffering comes from our failure to rule those plants? And what about marijuana, cocaine, and heroin? Man was told to control these things but he has lost that control. We are subdued and enslaved when God's purpose for us is to subdue and rule!

It's interesting to see how this theme of human control is picked up elsewhere in Scripture as a picture of Paradise. Human dominion was lost, but with God's kingdom it is restored. Think of Isaiah 11:**6** *The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them.* Isaiah 11:**8** *The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.* The animals will be subdued. Then we get the picture of Isaiah 35:**1-2a** (NLT) *Even the*

wilderness and desert will be glad in those days. The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with spring crocuses. 2 Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers. Isaiah 35:7 (NLT) The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived. But it's not a jungle. 9 No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it; these will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there. This is the promise to God's people of what is ahead. But what do we do now? Now we work to turn deserts into fields and jungles into gardens. God's command to subdue and rule is still valid. So, let's get to work. Well, uh, what does that mean practically? Shall we go home and swat a fly to exercise our dominion? Swat ahead but there's more to do. I think of how those trainers at Sea World have subdued whales and Walruses and otters. It's wonderful to see! But we can do more yet. The earth is ours and we must glorify God by subduing it and ruling it, even as we care for it and protect it. We need to take charge of every area of life. Don't reduce your Christianity to hymns and evangelism. It affects everything. It affects your job. What you do as work may not fulfill the great commission as mine does but it ought to fulfill the cultural mandate. And it should be seen by you as your God-given mission. You don't need to get a job with the church to be serving Jesus. Believers are to be taking control in every arena of human endeavor - medicine, agriculture, technology, music, law, even the garbage man subdues the human waste problem. You engineers aren't just earning a dollar, your studies and designs fulfill the cultural mandate. You moms do that as well by multiplying first of all and then subduing your sweet little beasts. Don't let disease, garbage, weeds, injustice, or rowdy kids control us. Take charge you workers and work with God's command in mind.

WORLD magazine included an interview some months back with author and scholar Charles Murray who is not a Christian but wrote a book called *Human Accomplishment*. In it Mr. Murray tries to figure out why outstanding accomplishment is not distributed equally among various cultures. He writes, "*A major stream of human accomplishment is fostered by a culture in which the most talented people believe that life has a purpose and that the function of life is to fulfill that purpose.*" Murray then points to Western Christian culture, really Protestant culture, as providing the best cultural context for real achievement. You have all heard of the Protestant work ethic. It is an idea that flows out of the Bible, that all we do is unto God and for God, and can make a difference for time and eternity. When you grasp this you have a motivation the world is missing. And so, the Christian should be on the vanguard of excellence in every field. He knows such

excellence honors God. He knows that considerate control honors God. II Corinthians 10:5c *We are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.* Not just religious thoughts, every thought, in engineering and homemaking and banking, in all areas of life our purpose is to reflect God's image by subduing the earth and ruling over it. How exactly you do that will differ somewhat or even greatly from how I am doing it, but whatever you do, this is to be your conscious purpose.

Now we move to the second aspect or way to reflect God's image. We reflect God's image by imitating His character, by becoming like God morally. This is clearly taught in Colossians 3:9-10 *Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--* Ephesians 4:23-24 *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.* What's this saying? It says that the saving work of God, which makes us new creatures in Christ is actually restoring to us that moral image of God which we lost through sin. I could go on to list verse after verse to demonstrate this point. I think of Romans 8:29 *For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.* II Peter 1:4 *For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature.* There are those verses that speak of the future work of God in us. What will be the end result of our salvation? I John 3:2 *Now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.* I Corinthians 15:49 *Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.* This is the great result, but if you are a true child of God the process is in motion right now. You are being renewed, being transformed. The Mormons teach that we become gods. That is heresy. The Bible teaches that we become **like** God – in our character, and that's the wonderful truth. Jesus Christ became like us in order to make us like Him. Are you a Christian? Do you know what that term means? Christian means *little Christ*. That is the work of our Lord. He gives us His Spirit and we become little Christs. When you say, "I'm a Christian" are you prepared to claim you are a little Christ? Well, just by taking that label you will influence what people think of Christ. They will expect you to reflect His image. Do you?

So, what is your life all about? What is your purpose? God said at the outset that man's purpose was to reflect His image. That was a great purpose, a wonderful purpose, but Adam failed. That is why God sent another Adam, the Ideal Man. In part, Jesus came to show us what a real man

is all about. What did this Jesus do? What was Jesus? Hebrews 1:**3a** *He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.* Do you see? This is what man is supposed to be. Did Jesus glorify God? Well, of course. How did He? By reflecting His image. Now then, how are we doing at this? We have found our reason for being - our purpose - what are you doing with it? That you reflect His image is God's purpose for your life - you've seen that. Now what is **your** purpose for your life, your reason for being? You say you want God's will? Great, here it is: God says, "Be like Me." He said in Ephesians 5:**1** *Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children.* This is man's reason for being. Most people don't know it. Few men actively pursue it. But the Bible says the reason this world is messed up is that man is not reflecting God's moral image. Sin has destroyed it. Isaiah 59:**2a** *Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.* Sin results in you being far from God. Now what does that mean? Isn't God everywhere? How can we be **far** from Him? The word *far* or *near* here does not refer to physical proximity but to likeness. To draw near to God is to become like Him and this is what Jesus has come to do - bring you near to God. So, what should be your goal and aim in life? To be like God, like Jesus, not in power and status - watch out here - that's what Eve wanted you see, that's what the devil tries to sell us - our goal is to be like God in spirit and in heart. Is that your conscious pursued objective in life? Really now is it? You can have a lot of sub-goals under that but this is why you were made and this is why you were redeemed - to be like your Lord.

How do you become like that? Just think for a minute. When an impressionist, wants to imitate some famous character what do you think he does first? He gets some film of that character and he studies him over and over again. He watches what he does and listens to how he speaks. He studies his subject thoroughly. And if you would be like God, step one is to get to know Him thoroughly. Study His word, that word which reveals God unto us. Come to understand what he is like and then start chiseling away at yourself until you look like Him. Someone went up to a sculptor who was chipping away at a great marble slab and asked, "What are you making?" He said, "An elephant." "Oh, that's interesting. How do you go about sculpting an elephant?" The sculptor said, "It's really simple. You take your hammer and chisel, go to your slab and knock away whatever doesn't look like an elephant. "So too you can attack your life with hammer and chisel to knock away whatever doesn't look like God. I once heard of a stone collector who polished his rocks in a rotating machine that jumbled the nuggets together until the rough edges were worn smooth. Someone asked the collector, "How do you know when a rock's been polished enough?"

He answered, "When I can see my reflection in it." When will God be done polishing our lives? When the Master Himself is reflected clearly in us.

Friends, there is a world of people out there without the slightest idea why they exist, what they are supposed to be and do. Their only hope is to stay too busy or too stoned to think about it. What misery that must be! But God has given us a purpose and a glorious purpose: To subdue and rule the earth, and to be like Him. As we do the first and become the second we reflect His image to one another and to the watching world and to our Father Himself. It is for His honor we exist and for His glory we live. The challenge for you this morning is to commit yourself to this purpose. You may already be walking in God's purpose to some degree, or you may not be walking in it at all. Listen, there is forgiveness for our failure and there is help for our future. The neat thing about living out God's purpose for your life is that, in doing so, you get His help. But for that to happen you have to renounce all the other junk you have been living for – the pursuit of sensual pleasure, the vanities of life, pride and money. It is time to embrace what life is really all about and make God's purpose for you, your purpose for you. Are you ready to say, "Yes, Lord. I want your character to be in me, Your purity, Your love, Your honesty?" Are you ready to say, "Yes, Lord, I will devote my energies and abilities to ruling well over that portion of the planet that is my jurisdiction, my room, my job, my body, and my family. I won't blame others, but will live responsibly as one appointed to be a subduer." And are you ready to say, "Lord, I can't do this at all without You, without Your grace, and Your Spirit living in me?" Lets make these things our prayer.