

Redeeming the Image of God

GENESIS 1:26-31

INTRODUCTION

In our current social environment, the most pressing question seems to be, “What does it mean to be a male or a female?” Even so, the question beneath that question is of much greater importance: “What does it mean to be human?” That question is on the minds of the philosophers and professors in these days. They want to be rid of any assumption that humanity has any relationship to God, or any idea of divinity. Since they assume man evolved as part of an unplanned material process, he is himself in flux. Whatever man is, he is earthbound and ever changing.

I read the answers of many modern day academics to the question: “What does it mean to be human?” Most all of them, no matter how they approached the problem, ended with environmentalism. In other words, they saw man, mostly, as an arrogant being who needed to humble himself and realize that he is only a reasoning animal who is destroying the earth and all the other creatures in it. Stephen Harding sums up best what the thinkers of our society conclude when answering the question, “What does it mean to be human?”:

“Thus, the most pressing challenge for our times is to awaken the ecological selves of as many people as possible within the shortest possible time. It is vitally important to help people to fall in love with the Earth, by whatever peaceful means possible.” –Stephen Harding, Schumacher College

They see humans as just one more animal that the earth accidentally produced. To them, humans are not a complete being made by God with a purpose. Instead, they are an ever-evolving creature. The optimistic professors think that we as a species are moving towards greater collective unity and solutions to future problems. The more pessimistic speak of us as if we are evolution’s great mistake, bringing about a species that dominates and destroys all the others.

Now, you may think, “Well, who cares what philosophers and professors think?” My answer is: we all should. The professors and philosophers are the university masters whose worldview is passed on to people in all professions. What the professors teach now, all of society will embrace within a generation. And professors have held this view for decades!

The great error of popular culture is that gender can be fluid, or a spectrum. A male can be partially female, and a female partially male, and that a sophisticated society will accept this view of gender. The greater error that allows this one to flourish is the belief that mankind is itself a spectrum, and that the definition of humanity is itself fluid and ever- changing. To be human isn’t really a thing, it is no more than, as one person labeled it, a non-scientific “folk” designation, determined by culture at any given moment.

With this underlying foundational definition of mankind, it is no wonder that there is little in culture to object when claims are made of sexual fluidity, or when people claim that the product of a woman's womb is not human, or even if it is, it has no great value.

As Christians, we know that God has revealed the answers to questions that mankind's smartest can't discover, including the answer to, "What does it mean to be human?"

TEXT: GENESIS 1:26-31

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

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

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

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

What It Means To Be Human, According to Genesis 1:

1. Humanity is made in the image of God.

The foundation stone that supports all that we will say on Man and Woman is the claim by God that we are made in His image. The Imago Dei, as it is also called.

God says,

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Notice first that God uses the first person plural to speak of Himself. We know that there is but One God, and that that God is Himself Three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Next, see that man is made differently than all the other things that God has made, including plants, animals, the earth itself, or even the planets and the stars. Only of man does God say, "Let us make him in our image." From this, we get our value.

What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God? It is hard to say because God does not define the ways in which we are like Him, and in what ways this sets us apart from the rest of Creation. That said, we can gather several things from Scripture.

First, we are made last, as the final act of Creation. This distinction indicates that we have the highest place in Creation. This thought is proven out in Psalm 8, where the Bible teaches us this:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, (Psa 8:3-6 ESV)

Mankind has greater importance than all the rest of humanity.

At this point, we must acknowledge the fall of Adam and Eve. The story of the Bible shows that the problem that God must solve is the one created by Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve, though holy at the time of Creation, chose to sin against God, and, ever since, their offspring is naturally born into rebellion and sin. More on that later.

The idea that man's value comes from being made in the image of God is further proven in the Scripture when we consider that man is allowed to kill animals to eat, as well as to sacrifice in worship, but is prohibited from murdering other human beings. In fact, the worst act of sin a human can do physically is to murder another human being. For this reason, God commands that if anyone murders a man, he himself should forfeit his own life as a way of making redemption for the harm he did. This is the ultimate punishment a human society can give another person, the death penalty, and it is given for the greatest crime, murder. God is clear about the reason for this:

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." (Gen 9:6 ESV)

No animal is given the distinction of being made in God's image. Man derives his superior value, not from his ability to dominate the earth, but rather by God's designation of him as His image-bearer.

It is important to note at this point the 10 Commandments, where the Bible says:

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, . . ." (Exo 20:4-5 ESV)

This prohibition on graven images calls for us to never make gods of our own hands and worship them. Centuries later, Aaron would sin against God by forming a calf of gold and putting it before the Hebrews, saying, "Behold your God that took you out of Egypt." The people worshiped that calf. People want images of God to worship, so they make them.

But God forbids this, for no one has seen Him, and none knows what He looks like.

That said, I can't help but wonder if part of the problem is that He made his own likeness and placed it on the earth already, not to be worshiped, but to reflect His glory—and that is you and me. Everything that God created displays His glory, but Adam and Eve uniquely reflected the image of God. God, looking at mankind, sees His reflection in some way that I cannot understand. This is why sin is such a serious problem, when instead of seeing His untainted image when He looks at us all, as He did when He created the earth, He sees that His image is marred by our rebellion and sin against Him.

It is an awful thing to throw purple paint on the side of your neighbor's house because you hate him and want to hurt him. It is worse to go into a museum of fine art and throw purple paint on the Mona Lisa, for it is of unique character and high value. How much worse is the sin of every human, for we have taken what is most valuable in all of Creation, ourselves, and marred it constantly with our sins.

2. Humanity is male and female.

Some humans are males, and some are females. These two sexes are complimentary to one another. Much of the confusion of our present day comes from having set aside this simple truth. We will deal with issues of male and female for many weeks to come, so I won't cover that now, except to point out the equality of value given to men and women in the text:

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

Male and female are equally image bearers with God, and therefore, are equal in value before God, and should be equal in value before mankind.

This equality is one of value, and is not to be thought of as "sameness." Male and female are not the same, but they have equal value to God.

3. Humanity is given dominion over the earth.

The text is clear that mankind is to rule the earth. He is the most important creature on earth, but he is not to be detached from it. He is to manage the animals, plants, land, and the seas. Logically, we can safely assume that Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, and without sin, would manage the world in a way that gives glory to their Creator. They would understand beauty, avoid cruelty, and seek to care for their home accordingly.

Nevertheless, mankind is not simply evolution's big mistake, the dangerous creature that has the most power to make trouble on the earth (although, that last phrase is true). Rather, we are to use our greater power of reason, creativity, and desire to worship God and to guide our roles as the earth's gardeners and zoo-keepers.

What we must never do is put man under animals, nor any other living thing.

4. Humanity's existence on the earth is a display of the goodness of God.

Adam's sin not only marred all of mankind that would come from Eve, but also brought destruction to the earth over which he was to superintend. However, we should not think that the earth is itself not a good thing, nor that man's existence is a blight upon the earth.

Even as Adam's fallen children, we must value and enjoy God's good Creation, and especially our fellow man.

God made the earth good. God made man good. Man fell, and the earth fell with him. But the story of the Bible is God rescuing us from that.

OUR VALUE DIMINISHED THEN INCREASED

It is true that our value comes from being made in the image of God. It is likewise true that our value has greatly been diminished by the fall into sin. No offspring of Adam and Eve can live forever, or be with God forever unless God intervenes, for though we are His image bearers, we are broken.

The big story of the Bible is how God, in His love for His Creation, doesn't simply restore Adam's and Eve's race to the life in the Garden before the Fall. No, rather, He elevates our value far beyond Adam's and Eve's original value by sending Jesus to die for us. [Let me show you this in the Scripture, and then give a closing illustration.](#)

Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1Co 15:45-57 ESV)

This text shows us that Jesus was God hitting the reset button. Adam was created to live, but he sinned and became weak and died. He passed on sin, weakness, and death to us all. We are all born to sin and born to die, and we all do sin and die.

But Jesus, though born in a weak body like Adam's, did not originate in the dust of the earth like Adam did. He came from Heaven. He was holy, and brought the power of God into the weak form of a man. He was like us in all ways, except He did not sin.

His life was different from all other of Adam's race because He did not sin. His death was different from all of Adam's race because He did not deserve to die like the rest. He gave His life to pay for the sins of Adam and all of his offspring. Having paid for sin, He rose from the dead, and now enables all who believe in Him to beat sin, weakness, and death too.

So, Adam, made without sin, fell and became weak, sinful, and died. Jesus took on the same weakness, but not the sin. He died to pay for sin and offers to all of Adam's race who will receive it, eternal life, free from sin, forever. Will you receive Jesus?

I'll come to that. First, an illustration.

I own the rookie Bret Favre Stadium Club card from 1991. I have had it for 26 years now. If it is in perfect condition, it is worth at least \$275. Now, if I take a sharpie pen to that card, and draw an X through Favre's face, scribble all over the back of it, and then cut the top of the card and rip it, and then put it in the wash, do you know what that card will be worth? Nothing.

However, if someone said, "Give me that card, and like magic, I will make it brand new," and he did, it would be worth \$275 again! But, if someone else said, "Don't give him the card to repair. Give it to me, and I will make it into gold," I'd give it to him. And then, if he were to take the card and return to me an exact replica, made from several ounces of pure gold, and with the likeness of Favre on it, and a stamp proving it was a 1991 Stadium Club printing, then I would have something worth thousands of dollars.

When we receive Jesus, it is like that.

Whatever value Adam and Eve had without sin was ruined when they fell into sin. But, when Jesus came, He didn't simply restore us to how it was in the Garden of Eden before sin. No, instead, God stamped us in the image of His own Son, Jesus, and gave us the ability to live forever in holiness, and with great joy.