

The Image of God (1)

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[0:00] We're going to read from Genesis chapter 1. Genesis chapter 1. Fear not, this is not a new series in the book of Genesis.! Genesis 1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light, and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day. Let's move on to verse 20.

And God said, let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens. So God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.

[1:36] And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply in the earth.

And there was evening, and there was morning, the fifth day. And God said, let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds, livestock and creeping things, and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.

And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds, and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. 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. So God created man in his own image.

[2:44] In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. 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.

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

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.

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

Heavenly Father, bring your ancient and powerful word into the present, so that it can be delivered and heard with all the freshness of a new day, with all the immediacy of a friend's embrace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[3:59] Amen. Who am I?

Who are you? The French reformer, John Calvin, begins his famous Institute of the Christian Religion with the statement, all true knowledge consists in the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self.

All true knowledge consists in the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self. If I want to know who I am, and you want to know who you are, we can only know these things in connection with who God is.

One of the reasons our society is so disillusioned and lost is that nobody knows who they are. And they don't know it because they don't know who God is. As our society moves further away from God, it becomes more confused about what it means to be a human individual.

What it means for me to be me, and for you to be you. Self-worth has plummeted, and our young people struggle to find their place in the world.

[5:18] Confusion about who they are leads to strange and weird behaviors, all of which are at base a cry for help, and a desperate plea for an answer to the question, who really am I?

Well, to answer that question, we need to go back to beginnings in Genesis 1, where in verse 27, we read these words, so God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. And I want to suggest three things this morning about who we are. First of all, we were made.

Secondly, we were molded. And thirdly, we were multiplied. Made, molded, multiplied. Made, first of all.

We were made. Until relatively recently, the vast majority of our society believed that human beings were made by God. We're not the product of mindless random mutations.

[6:23] We are the wise and powerful design of God. So the children's catechism begins with the question, who made you? To which the answer was, God.

We knew our place in the universe, not just as part of our world, but because we were the subjects of God's special creation, we were apart from the world.

We were set apart from the flora and fauna of the world in which we live by virtue of God's special creation of us. But over the last century or so, this understanding has been eroded and stolen.

As God has steadily been removed from social discourse, we become naked apes. There's nothing special about us. We're of the same value as any other beast.

We're of no more worth than a virus or a bacteria. It's little wonder that people struggle so much with self-worth when they are force-fed that there's nothing special about them at all.

[7:27] There is no God who made them, and therefore they have no value. However, our Bibles begin with the statement, in the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth.

God created all things. The universe is not the product of a mindless series of random events. It is the wise and powerful activity of the God of the Bible.

From nothing de novo, He created the sun and the sea and the stars, the land and the animals and the trees. But then as the apex of His creative wisdom, we read that God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness, and then so God created man.

We are the special creation of God. We are the unique apex of His creative work. The way in which this word created was translated by the early Jewish Greeks was by a word from which we get our English word, poem.

Poem. We talk about the great poets and their greatest poems. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Man, and Robbie Burns, Auld Lang Syne.

[8:47] God, the greatest of all poets, wrote the greatest of all poems and called it humanity. We are God's greatest work of art.

In the Christian worldview of how much more worth is a human being than a virus, we are set apart by virtue of our special creation by God.

Now, this has huge implications for us. Huge implications for us. The fact that we were made by God as His greatest poem, His climactic creative act, changes the world for us.

And I cannot, in the space of a few minutes a sermon takes to preach, cover all the implications, but let me suggest just three. In the first instance, it means that every human life is special to God.

Every human life is special to God. Every human being is made by God, and therefore every human being is special to God. His work of poetry.

[9:54] Now, it's perhaps easy to see that when we consider the greatest of human nobility, when we see these great athletes competing this week at the Commonwealth Games, but it's harder to see that when we consider the greatest of all human ugliness.

The greatest of all sportsmen and sportswomen were made by God, but so were the criminals, and so were the terrorists, and so were the drug abusers.

We're disgusted when we read of murderers and their horrible crimes, but these murderers and their victims were both made by God. We are disgusted by terrorists and their mindless fanaticism, but they were created by God.

Every human life is special to Him. Those we hate are special to Him. Our enemies are special to God.

We are not slugs to be stepped upon. In the first morning of the Battle of the Somme, the British Army lost 16,000 men, and every one of these 16,000 was special to God.

[11:08] We can never treat another human being as subhuman, a pest to be squashed, scum to be killed. The moment we begin to treat other human beings as subhuman is the moment society falls apart.

It is no coincidence whatsoever when you think about it that the most murderous societies in our world are those which do not share a Christian worldview.

The further a society moves away from the God of the Bible, the less human beings matter, and the more violent we become. As Christians, we must never treat another person as anything less than God's special creation.

In the second instance, because every human life is special to God, it must be special to us. It must be special to us. Every human being, however weak, however vulnerable, is precious to God.

The hospital movement, as we know it today, was begun by the famous Florence Nightingale, a Christian who believed that she was being called by God to care.

[12:22] The hospice movement, to which we owe so much, was begun by Dame Cicely Saunders, another Christian. The emancipation of slaves in Britain was coordinated by the famous William Wilberforce, a Christian.

Late 19th century workers' rights in Britain were secured by Lord Shaftesbury, another Christian. See how the uniqueness of human life seen through the spectacles of a Christian worldview has shaped our society for good?

Why in general are we as Christians anti-abortion? It is because we believe every human life is special to God, especially the weakest and most vulnerable.

Why are we as Christians anti-euthanasia? It's because we believe every human life is special to God, especially the weakest and most vulnerable. Again, it's no coincidence that the further our society moves away from the God of the Bible, the more abortion and euthanasia raise their ugly heads.

Proponents of euthanasia often call their position compassionate, and they argue that because we would relieve a dog's suffering by putting it down, we should do the same with human beings.

[13:45] And on the surface of things, it's a very powerful argument, but the fundamental problem with it is absolutely crystal clear. We are not dogs. We are human beings, and we are special to God.

We have far more worth in His eyes. We are not problems to be done away with. We are precious and to be cared for. And the third application of this point is very plain.

Because every human life is special to God, God went to the most extreme lengths to demonstrate our worth to Him. When in Genesis chapter 3, human beings fell from the innocent state in which He had made them, God did not abandon them.

He promised them a Savior, the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. God did not throw us away like trash on a heap. He loved us, and He planned our reconciliation and redemption.

Jesus died on the cross for us because God made us. The creation and the cross are intimately linked. The great Christian thinker, Francis Schaeffer, who some of you may have heard of, once said that if he was given one hour to convince someone to become a Christian, he'd spend 55 minutes speaking to that person about where humankind comes from, and then five minutes speaking about the cross.

[15:15] Well, whether you agree with Schaeffer or not, our creation and salvation are vitally connected by virtue of God's special creation of humanity.

There are so many more applications we could make of this cardinal statement, so God created man. Who am I, we ask? The first level of answer we give is this, I was made by God, I'm His divine poem, I'm of special worth to Him, therefore I must never think of myself as worthless.

Second, we were molded. We were molded. The verse continues, so God created man, this is verse 27, God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him.

Of course, the man God created really is a them. When God talks about, when talking about God creating man in His own image, Moses the writer is referring to man and woman.

This is not an invitation, as we'll see in the next point, to view the male form as the image of God, whereas the female form is not the image of God. The man God created is really a them, a humanity.

[16 : 37] But what's of supreme importance here is in what the image of God consists. Some have mistakenly suggested that the image of God consists in us having a head, two arms, and two legs.

It's mistaken, of course, because God doesn't have a body at all, He's a spirit. To understand what it means to be made in the image of God is to probe the God in whose image we are made.

In verse 26, we read, and God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. Notice the plural forms.

The one God calls Himself us and our, which means that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity shapes our understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God.

God is one in three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, existing in eternal communion and relationship within Himself. So, to be made in the image of God is to be made for communion and relationship.

[17 : 48] To be truly human means to live in community. God molded us for relationship with Himself and with other human beings. the famous Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck said of the image of God that it means we are disposed for communion with God.

We are disposed for communion with God. Human beings were not created for solitude but for society. We've been molded, first of all, for relationship with God.

with God. To be truly human means to live in a fulfilling relationship with our Creator. St. Augustine famously said, Lord, Thou hast created us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.

We are incomplete as human beings unless we live in relationship with God. Our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Which means that the Christian gospel is the answer to what it means to be truly human.

The Christian gospel is that by believing in Christ and His sacrifice we are reconciled with God and that's what it means to be a man or woman made in the image of God.

[19 : 11] You are never more of a human being than when you're walking closely with your Creator and Redeemer. And that's a very important reason why we want to proclaim the gospel to the peoples of Glasgow because we want to humanize our city.

We want to humanize our city. We see our friends and our neighbors living in dehumanizing isolation from God and we want them to learn what it means to be truly human.

To be made in the image of God and disposed for communion with Him. But in the second instance we've been molded for relationship with other human beings.

We are not only disposed for communion with God but through Him with others. We cannot but relate to others. Now this isn't a comment on whether it's better to be an extrovert or an introvert because even introverts like myself lead the company of other people.

But it's a statement that to be truly human we must live in community with other human beings. And the good news of the gospel is it restores not only our relationship with God but also fills us with love for other people.

[20 : 31] As Christians more than anyone else we are built for relationship and that's why it's in the context of a church like this we demonstrate and exalt in our true humanity.

The essence of God's command to us is this love the Lord your God with all your heart soul strength and mind and love your neighbor as yourself.

This isn't a command which is alien to us as human beings it's written into our DNA. The word of God became flesh he dwelt among us God became a human being Jesus died to transform us from being alienated from God suspicious of each other to being truly human disposed for a relationship with God and other human beings.

We are made in the image of God. The harshest punishment we can deal out to someone is to place them in solitary confinement their whole lives through because it robs them of their humanity. We'd be better killing them there than them. How careful we must be then by virtue of our nature as human beings to strive to know and to be known by others to be loved by and to love God.

[21 : 57] And that's what the gospel's for. Made molded and then thirdly multiplied. Multiplied.

Moses the writer of Genesis concludes verse 27 by saying male and female he created them. God did not create one man from which he created the whole of humanity he created a human pair male and female.

Genesis 2 may talk about how he did that but the point's good. the God who created us for relationship created us in relationship.

The God who created us for relationship created us in relationship. Male and female created he them. God created us as a multiple of ourselves as a more than one.

There is no hint of a distinction between the dignity and status of men and women in the creation ordinance of God. Yes they had different roles but before God they would have equal value.

[23 : 05] You will notice that in the Christian world view men and women share equal worth. One is not more than another one is not more important than another.

We can scarce believe that in our modern civilized society the sexual oppression of women is on the rise. in my local club the David Lloyd my local gym the David Lloyd club the managers have just announced a woman's only night in the spa so men are not allowed to go into the spa between 7 and 8 p.m.

on a Wednesday evening. It's fine for me because I'm at the prayer meeting anyway. So should you be. In this bastion of Glasgow's middle classes the reason the managers have done this is because young men are making sexually suggestive comments to young women in the spa.

It's a disgrace and it angers me to know that women do not feel safe in my gym. In speaking to a female friend of mine at the gym she says she gets and I was completely in a way to this probably because of my gender she gets sexually suggestive comments made to her every day at work in the gym as she's walking down the street everywhere.

What is it with our young men with their toxic masculinity who think of women as objects to be used and abused? But again the further we get away from the God of the Bible the more society has become sexualized and the more our women are at risk of abuse.

[24 : 50] And again that's not to say that men and women share the same roles in church and society but they are created as you can see here equal in the sight of God. In Christ there is no male or female but all are one in him.

But not only does this multiplicity principle extend to the relationship between the genders but also to many other relationships. It refers to the relationships between the races between the races. Many 19th century Americans from the south justified their position on slavery by insisting that African slaves were not as human as they were. They ignored the central principle of multiplicity. Racism has no place in the Christian church because all men and women of whatever race are created equal in the sight of God. And they also forgot that the Christian church was birthed not in Europe among white people like me but in the Middle East and in North Africa among heavily colored Christians.

The principle of multiplicity also extends to our relationship to what we used to call the disabled. Traditionally disabled people were thought of as being children of a lesser God.

[26 : 13] The Christian worldview transforms our attitude. If the image of God isn't physical but an inbuilt need for relationship what we call disability is no barrier at all.

We all have certain disabilities it's just that perhaps their disabilities are more obvious than ours. Therefore on the basis of God's creation order we must make every effort to equalize their disabilities.

besides which of course Jesus did not come for the healthy but for the sick and the vast majority of those with whom he worked were disabled. Now there are many other examples we could cite of this principle of multiplicity as I'm calling it from Genesis 1 27 class distinctions vocational distinctions personality distinctions being some but to be truly human means to live in a society where everyone is different and yet considered of equal worth where the gospel is to be offered to all not just to those we consider worth it.

Now we've traveled much ground I'd like to think we've seen how the special creation of humankind by God his special redemption of us through the death of Jesus transforms our world view.

There is much to think through much of which perhaps we need to repent of and change in order to be truly human in the way we relate to God and the way we love one another.

[27 : 53] But what I want to conclude with is a matter which I feel needs to be better exposed and condemned. God made us in his image.

That is where our supreme worth as human beings lies. He made us human beings and he relates to us as human beings. We are not objects to God we are people.

We are not animals we are human beings. Throughout the Bible men and women relate to God in terms of I and you. So we could repeat this a thousand times but let me give you an example. you are my God and I will worship you. Or let me find another wonderful example. Oh God Psalm 63 verse 1 Oh God you are my God earnestly I seek you. the God who respects our humanity calls us you.

[29:02] We are not an it to God. We are not objects like a pulpit or a pair of spectacles. We are people of special worth and value to God.

Now I use this object I use objects I use a pulpit and I use a pair of spectacles but we must never use human beings. We must never exploit human beings or use them as a means to our own ends. I was listening recently to a radio interview with the biographer of a lady called Victoria Guifrey! Guifrey? Now her name might not be familiar to you it certainly wasn't to me. She was the most famous victim of the sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. She later took her own life as a result of the abuse she received.

The most damning thing she said about the crimes committed against her to her biographer was that she felt used. And that is what sexual abuse is really all about.

[30:11] Using victims. I'd go as far as to say that in whatever context whether carnal career or church to use someone is to abuse someone.

It is to rob them of their dignity as one made in the image of God. So when I say how can I use this person to achieve my own ends I'm treating them like an object rather than a person I'm doing the most ungodlike thing I'm abusing them by using them.

And I've seen this sin more times than I care to count in the church. Wrapped up in holy garb. It is a most recent letter to us Dr.

Adam who for visitors benefit is our missionary in Central Asia. He wrote these words these are wonderful words from a very wonderful man. He said any abuse of another human being most and foremost is an affront and offense against God.

He writes using a person physically or emotionally for one's own pleasure and advancement is an abomination committed against the Lord.

[31:31] You can just imagine him standing here saying those words can't you? However noble your objective may be to plant churches to further theological education to grow a church to engage in a mission never use another human being to achieve it for in so doing you are abusing God.

God does not! God does not use us as pawns in a game of spiritual chess.

He treats us with love and confers upon us a dignity we do not deserve. Rather than throw us away like trash when we fell into sin He sent His glorious Son to die for us on the cross so that by faith I can live eternally with Him knowing Him even as He knows me.

Who am I then? I am dearly loved by God and literally I am worth the whole world to Him. So are you.

You are dearly loved by God and you are worth the whole world to Him. If that doesn't change your view of God of the world and of yourselves nothing will.

[33:14] Let us pray. Heavenly Father we can scarce believe that you are a God who would never use us to achieve your aim whatever that aim might be to glorify the name of your Son.

You treat us as human beings and we're worth the world to you because you gave your Son for us on the cross. You made us in your image.

Father we pray that you would bring our society back to these foundations of its dignity and worth to you of the cross of Jesus Christ and of how much you love a sinful humanity that you would have sent your Son to die for it.

We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.