

God's Good Design

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Moses asserts man was created in the likeness of God. Man was not in the image of God.

Man was not thus God, joining the pantheon of gods like the pagan religion. Man was just like God, reflecting God. Man is like God, but different from Him.

Man is not another God. Man is still a creature unlike God in so many ways. Man, therefore, is not another animal. He's the pinnacle of creation.

The repeated refrain of Genesis 1 is, And it was good. And it was good. And it was good. That's not a refrain of mild satisfaction, but a beaming joy.

[0 : 5 4] Even as all creation is the overflow of God's delight in Himself, creation increases His delight at this one and the same moment. But unique among all of creation, God rejoices greatly and most significantly over man.

It says, Behold, it was very good. The first instance of poetry in the Bible is not the creation of the moon, but the creation of man. Who is this creature formed in my image and made in my likeness?

Ken Hughes beautifully captures this. Though you could travel a hundred times the speed of light, pass countless yellow-orange stars to the edge of the galaxy, and swoop down to the fiery glow located a few hundred light years below the plain of the Milky Way.

Though you could slow to examine the host of hot young stars luminous among the gas and dust. Though you could observe close up the proto-stars poils to burst forth from their dusty cocoon.

In all your stellar journeys, you would never see anything equal to the birth and wonder of a human being. For a tiny baby or girl, a tiny baby girl or boy is the apex of God's creation.

[2 : 1 0] But the greatest wonder of all is that the child is created in the image of God. The imago Dei.

The child once was not. Now as a created soul, he or she is eternal. He or she will exist forever.

When the stars of the universe fade away, that soul shall still live. What does it mean, though, to be created in the image of likeness of God?

Some people wonder throughout the history of the church, is it the image and likeness of God? Does that mean, they would argue that there's kind of this inner spiritual part of you that's creating the image of God, and the soul of you that's set apart, creating the image of God.

But that can't be, because after the fall into sin, into corruption and sin, we're still called as being beings created in the image of God.

[3 : 1 4] So something wasn't lost when all was lost. The two things stand out in the text for what the image of God means. Immediately after creating them, God spoke to them.

Look in verse 28. God blessed them. Then God said to them. God wasn't speaking to the moon and the stars. He wasn't speaking to the animals and the plants. God suddenly, though, speaks to man.

Similar to God, men and women are not driven by impulse. Men and women are created with the capacity to think and to consider, to make decisions. They're intelligent. Similar to God, they listen and speak.

Similar to God, they make and form and mold. Consider the wildly creative work of man and reflect it in Mozart's Requiem, or the Hoover Dam, or the Egyptian pyramids, or the iPhone, or the institutes of the Christian religion.

One of my favorite moments is when you see the capacity, not merely to be an intelligent being, but when you see the capacity to relate.

[4 : 21] One of my favorite moments as a father is when you begin to relate with your child. When you get a little feedback. You know, at first it's kind of the eyes, a little response to light and different things.

I remember one time I was working on a message at church office, and my oldest son was just a few months old, and I was calling Kim to check in, push dinner back or something.

I was working on the message, and I said, hey, put Rev on the phone. And he said, this is going to sound really silly, but he was like, made a noise, like, uh.

And I said, uh. And he goes, uh. And we're like, it was total babble, but we were connecting in a weird way, and you might think I'm really weird after that, but it was the beginning of a relationship.

As much as you like your dog, as much as you know your cat hates you, you're not relating in that way.

[5 : 36] Man is completely unique, utterly unique, the most fascinating creature. Immediately after them, creating them, God also calls them to rule.

Look at verse 26. He says, let us make man, let him have dominion. Verse 28, when he says to them, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it, have dominion.

In ancient times, when a king conquered a land, he would set statues of himself all throughout the land to let everybody know, this is my land, not your land. In a similar way, that's what God does.

He creates us in his image to rule on his behalf, created to image him, to tell the world, this world belongs to the king, and to bring the kingdom to earth in this world.

So let us celebrate, adorn the good design of man, male and female, in the image of God. Point two, all people are created male and or female. All people are created male or female.

[6 : 44] Verse 26 underlines the unity of all people. All people are made in the image of likeness of God. All people are given a responsibility to rule over creation, but verse 27 acts as the foundational difference among people.

All people are similarly created in the image of God, but all people are created differently as male and female. We see that in verse 27, put poetically and wonderfully. God created male in his own image. In the image of God, he created them.

Male and female, he created them. There are extremely rare cases of abnormalities like intersexuality, but generally, all people are created in the image of God, male or female.

Denny Burke says it simply, these two divine image bearers come in two distinct genres, male and female.

male. We must remember, even as we consider the scripture reading that we read today, God is not male or female. God is a spirit.

[7 : 51] As the catechism says, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. God is spiritual and is not male or female, but God has designed man or woman to be created in his image and to both reflect and represent him.

That's why the Lord compares himself to a father who takes pity on his children and a mother who cannot forget her nursing children. God disciplines those he loves like a father, but also comforts like a mother.

It's telling us, it's not telling us that these attributes, these virtues are incidental, but that they're integral to expressing who we are as created in the image of God.

while all people reflect and represent God by virtue of being called in his image, there's a foundational difference among people being made male or female.

Now, all that seems pretty straightforward. So, why is it so disputed right now? Well, there's an increasing tendency to see person that is separate from and distinct from our body.

[9 : 04] There's been, in the history of the world, in philosophy, different things, a tendency to view body and soul as distinctly separate, as a duality that makes up men and women, or makes us up, makes up our constitution that's very separate.

In Greek thought, in many ancient religions, the soul, the inner person, was believed to be the spiritual part, while the body was believed to be earthly and unspiritual and icky.

Like, we don't want to mess with the bodily part of our body, and maturity in most ancient religion was viewed and understood as a pursuit of greater and greater freedom from the bodily urges.

This way of thinking has shaped the church more than we realize. The great theologian, Augustine, makes this mistake when he views sex as unspiritual and even sinful if not pursued actively in that moment for the purpose of procreation.

I don't agree with Augustine. Many strands in the history of the church have made this mistake when they overemphasize the biblical commands of self-denial, fasting, prayer, and underemphasize the bodily urges of food, drink, sex, and relationship.

[10 : 25] We see it in the way they talk about work, a sacred and a secular divide. It runs through so much of the way we think. C.S. Lewis quips very helpfully, there's no good in trying to be more spiritual than God.

Maybe that's what you need this Memorial Day weekend. God never meant for man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why he uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us.

We may think this rather crude and unspiritual, earthly, and icky. God does not. He invented eating. He likes matter.

He invented it. Be careful. My point is, we are body and spirit always together.

We are living souls. We are embodied spirits. Wendell Berry helpfully says, God did not make a body and put a soul into it like a letter into an envelope.

[11 : 35] He formed man of dust. Then, by breathing his breath into it, he made the dust live. Humanity is thus presented to us in Adam not as a creature of two discrete parts temporarily glued together, but as a single mystery.

That is, if you're tracking, that is so helpful. That's what's going on. The body is therefore not a prison. It's a temple. It's a marvelous work of God's creation.

It's our earthly dwelling. It's our organ, our instrument, our vessel for the service of God. Therefore, body and soul are what make up personhood, our identity as creatures made in the image of God.

Herman Baffing helpfully says, the whole being, therefore, and not something in man like a soul or a spirit, but man himself is the image of God.

Nowhere is this proven more clearly than the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but we don't have time to do that. But this distinction, this duality lives on. It's alive and well.

[12 : 51] Our culture, I have a little graphic for you, views person as separate or distinct from our body. If you go to that next slide.

Kind of use a harsh distinction between person, which is the private, subjective, true, authentic self, the inner me, whatever, the part you, you do you with, and then the body being the biology, anatomy, assigned sex, etc.

We see this harsh distinction, this duality played out in the debate about abortion. In early stages of life, many believe the fetus is just a scientific fact, just an organism, but it does not have personhood and thus does not have legal rights.

That's from the Supreme Court's ruling until it was overturned. A person is identified as someone with an authentic self.

What in the world does that mean? We see this distinction in the debate about homosexuality. Now, if God had created man, male, and female to join them together in marriage and fill the earth, then homosexuality is an undoing of God's design of creation.

[14 : 13] Not only is it explicitly forbidden in the Scriptures, it is going against the design of biological sex. But listen to the way this New Testament scholar defends same-sex marriage.

Luke Timothy Johnson said, I think it's important to state clearly that we do in fact reject the straightforward commands of Scripture. Now, that's helpful. What he's about to say, he's saying he's rejecting the straightforward commands of Scripture.

Most people don't say that. And appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be wholly good. Okay, well, what is that authority?

Well, he asked the question actually. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience. And the experience of thousands of others who have witnessed to which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us.

Now, hold that up for just a moment. What he's arguing is our felt experience defines the way in which God created us.

[15 : 28] So what he is doing, he's dislocating personhood from body. Body is incidental to the definition of personhood.

I know this may be cloudy, but I think it's very important and helpful. Instead of doing it, by the designation of God.

We see this distinction, this duality played out most clearly in transgender. One LGBT group says everyone has a gender identity. This is the gender that someone feels they are.

This might be the same as the gender they were given as a baby, but it might not. They might feel like they are a different gender or they might feel like a boy or a girl.

There's a couple things going on here. According to that statement, gender is separate from gender identity. That's a very common, that's the language that's being used.

[16 : 35] Gender is different from the body, from that which you were given as a baby, it says, from assigned sex. Gender separate, gender identity is separate from biological sex.

Gender identity is based on personhood, on your private, subjective, true, authentic self. That's what you hear when you hear the slogan, I am not my body. I am not my body. I am a woman trapped in a man's body.

But the Bible does not present personhood that way. The Bible presents personhood as spirit and body.

The Bible presents personhood in such a way that it includes our biological sex. Our statement of faith, which I think is very well done on this point, said, men and women are both made in the image of God and are equal before him in dignity and worth.

Gender designated by God through our biological sex is therefore neither incidental to our identity nor fluid in its definition, but is essential to our identity as male and female.

[17 : 56] So you see what that text is doing is bringing together gender with identity, not separating gender from gender identity and bringing them together.

Men and women are created, are made in the image of God. Gender is not randomly assigned but divinely designated through biological sex. Gender is not incidental to our identity being something we can receive or reject, but it is essential.

Part of understanding who you are is understanding your gender. gender. You are not merely a person created in the image of God, you're a male or a female person created in the image of God.

This reality is not just in verse 26 to 27, it's made immediately clear in the context. Look in verse 28, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion.

This command includes many things but the command cannot be fulfilled apart from God's good design for sex and procreation in the covenant of marriage. To be fruitful and multiply at its most fundamental level means to get married and have kids.

[19 : 16] That's what it means. To be a man or woman therefore cannot be disconnected from sexuality. To be a man is to be a son.

To have the capacity to be a husband, a father and a brother. To be a woman is to be a daughter and have the capacity to be a wife, mother and sister.

These relationships are structural and non-reversible. They're undoable. What I mean by that is no matter how many hormones ingested or surgeries undertaken, no biological male will be able to conceive and carry children.

No biological females will be able to impregnate another to conceive children. Every person fighting in this debate is born of this non-reversible design.

And so we must celebrate it and adorn the good design of male and female image of God everywhere we can.

[20 : 31] It's our duty. Three, all people have dignity, value and worth. All people have dignity, value and worth.

To be created in the image of God is to be made like God, to reflect and represent him. To have dignity, value and worth by virtue of God's design. We see this fact again and again throughout scripture in Genesis 9.

The Bible warns us about killing those created in the image of God. Genesis 9, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. For God made man in his own image.

That's why you don't mow down whoever you want to. James 3 warns us about cursing those created in the image of God. With it we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

Why must you refuse to kill? Why must you refuse to abort an inconvenient conception? Why must you put off gossip and slander, endless criticizing and cursing?

[21 : 37] Because of the image of God. Because when you curse another image bearer, you're not just cursing them, you're cursing God. They are his creature.

And every creature with whom we interact is an image bearer of God with intrinsic dignity, value and worth. One commentator says these verses, Genesis 1, require us to take all human beings infinitely seriously.

seriously. To take all human beings infinitely seriously. This is why we fight for life from the tomb. Why we celebrate the overturning of Roe v.

Wade. I'll never forget, I was working on a message. Believe it or not, I do other things and work on messages, but I was working on a message at a Starbucks. Somebody text me, Roe v.

Wade was overturned. For some reason I had my phone on read the text messages and it read it over me, read it into my ears. I was listening to music. I immediately started crying.

[22 : 48] Now that's not surprising, but because God, I'm not crying over a political triumph. I'm happy with that.

I'm crying over the saving of life. It's my duty as an image bearer to protect life. And so we protect it.

Approximately 90% of those who have prenatal testing and discover their child has Down Syndrome choose to abort. But infinitely more beautiful than a Hawaiian sunset or a solar eclipse or the snow capped Rockies is the smiling face of a child with Down Syndrome.

Or the smiling face of someone with some genetic disorder. infinitely more brilliant than the Himalayan ice caps or the brilliance of Niagara Falls or Grand Canyon's expanse or the comfort of those old smoky mountains is the mind of a child with autism.

They're in the image of God. They're stamped in His design. And so we protect life from the wound to the tomb.

[24 : 00] Never forget years ago when my mother-in-law was dying of Alzheimer's. God bless all the people that work in these retirement homes that take care hospice nurses and what not.

But I remember having this deep conviction to treat her with dignity even when the world is just done with her. She's lost all her faculties.

She can't feed herself, clean herself, wipe herself, bathe herself, any of those things, but she is an image bearer. So we will change the diaper because she's stamped in the image of God.

That's our duty, beloved. That's our duty. And this is why we fight to treat everyone we deal with regardless of their race, background, lifestyle, sexual orientation with dignity, value, and worth.

To uphold all that the Bible says about human nature and sexuality in this day is going to require courage and compassion. We're going to need courage. But the courage we will need is not the ability to stand up with our tribe.

[25 : 14] The courage we will need will not be to march or merely to refuse to fly a flag or to spout out a slogan. The courage we will need is the ability to stand out from our tribe when the time comes.

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that nearly everyone you know, maybe that is a little bit, but many that you know will cave when their child transitions,!

When a family member chooses a homosexual lifestyle, when the preaching of the truth at their church hurts their business during the week, when they get funky looks at the supermarket.

I don't know. I mean, I think parents, you've got to be ready for this. I'm going to post later this week a lot of resources, but recommended resources. There's one in there called Gender Ideology by a lady named Sharon James.

Very helpful 80 to 90 page book. She has a whole chapter on how to help your kid. Because if your kid doesn't have a kid in his class trying to transition to another sex, then they will.

[26 : 39] But we're going to need compassion, too. This week, I read the story of a biological male turned woman describing gender dysphoria, the feeling of being stuck in the wrong body.

I'd never thought about that. And yet, describe them, my heart just sunk. Followers of sexual revolution need our compassion.

That doesn't mean we concede our theological categories and call them by whatever pronoun they choose. To do so is to go against image bearing, against the creation ordinance and the ninth commandment.

But it does mean we hold out the gospel as the only hope with tears in our eyes. I want to be like Christ that looked out on the crowds and saw them.

They were scattered like sheep. One of my greatest desires is that as the world gets darker, the light of Trinity grace would get brighter.

[27 : 37] fear that we would not pull away into a holy huddle, try to keep our kids safe, build our own little kingdom with a white picket fence. We devote ourselves to evangelism.

To proclaim in the gospel to every person under heaven, every person, especially those buying the lies of the sexual revolution. transition.

I want to tell you a story about Rhea Cooper. And this book by Ryan T. Anderson that's banned by Amazon, which is the reason I think you should go buy it, called When Harry Became Sally.

He says about, and this is Rhea talking, she says, it wasn't until I was 15 that I found out about transitioning. Everything fell into place.

This is who I was. I realized I could have the body I wanted. When I went to my general practitioner, age 17, I was told that I was too old to refer to children's services and too young to be seen as adult.

[28 : 42] I didn't get my first appointment until three months after my 18th birthday. After months of waiting and appointments, none of which included counseling, I finally started on testosterone gel, later switching to injections.

It was a huge thing when at a university my voice broke and my figure started changing, my hips narrowed, my shoulders broadened. It felt right. Passing as a man, I felt safer in public places.

I was taken more seriously when I spoke and I felt more confident. Then I had chest surgery and it was botched and I was left with terrible scarring.

I was traumatized. For the first time, I asked myself, what am I doing? I delayed the next steps of a hysterectomy and lower surgery.

I'd always assumed the problem was my body, but I gradually came to the conclusion that I had to detransition. Came off testosterone and as my body had resumed production of its own hormones, I became someone female who looks like a man.

[29 : 50] I will always have a broken voice and will never regrow breasts. But my hips and thighs are getting bigger.

I feel sad when I think of my fertility. I want to be a parent one day, but it's likely that being on testosterone has made that more difficult.

Now in my late 20s and won't know until I try to have kids. I was so focused on trying to change my gender, never stopped to think about what gender meant.

It's devastating. That's someone caught in the ideological machine.

What she needs is not our politicizing, our compassion. Could you talk with her? Would you have compassion for her?

[30 : 58] Have you ever spoken with someone struggling with same-sex attraction? Ever really interacted with someone who was a homosexual or a lesbian?

Could you enter their world? Hear their story? Is it too gross?

Too scary? Too unsafe? Too sinful? Shame on us. If we say yes. Brothers and sisters, we're the only ones with the answer.

The gospel. We didn't find it. It found us. God opened our eyes to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

My hope is that armed with these truths, we would not try to win a cultural war, but win the gospel war. All these people, there's no, as T.S. Lewis said, there's no ordinary person.

[32 : 03] They're eternal souls headed to one destiny. It doesn't matter how marred their body is, they're going to one destiny. We're the only people that can rescue them from that destiny that they deserve.

I long for those battered and bruised from the sexual revolution. Those with confused hormones and scarred breasts. I pray that we'd have a chance to share the only message under heaven by which they must be saved.

That's the message I offer you today. You may come in with all of the confusion this world brings, but there is one message you must hear and stand on and cling to. It's the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Wonderfully, he who spoke light into darkness does it again and again and again. He who said let light shine into the darkness, shines into our heart, is dead and trespasses and sin, that he might bring us into the light.

I offer you that. I offer you Jesus Christ and let us press forward armed, not with ideology, but with the gospel.

[33 : 15] Celebrating and adorning the good design of male and female, wherever we can, looking weirder and weirder as it goes. May God bless us.

Father in heaven, we cast ourselves on you completely. We offer ourselves to you sincerely and completely. Father, there are so many temptations when it comes to these truths.

I pray that we be drawn up in the wonder of being loved by you, being made like you, given the privilege of reflecting and representing you and awaiting an eternity in your presence.

Lord, I pray that the good word, the seed, would go forth and find good soil in our hearts, the gospel. I pray that we'd be gospel men and women in a time where people are quick to rush to the side they stand on, that we would stand on the gospel and offer it to a broken and confused world with tears filled eyes.

We praise you and bless your name in Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

[34 : 40] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. Thank you, sir, for more information