

# Biblical Anthropology

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion"  
(Genesis 1:26 ESV)*

*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?  
(Psalm 8:3-4 ESV)*

## **In The Image And Likeness Of God**

**January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

**Genesis 1:26-31**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Genesis 1:26; that's on page 1 in the church Bibles. This morning we are continuing to lay the foundation in our series on Biblical Anthropology. We cannot live well or wisely in this world unless we know who God is, who we are and how God has saved us through the person and work of Christ; so for the next several weeks and months we are talking about that middle part. We're asking the question: WHO ARE WE? Who are we in relation to God. Who are we in relation to each other? Who are we in relation to this world?

Last week we were talking about the fact that we are HUMANS CREATED by God. That is to say we are SPECIAL but SECONDARY. We are not the highest point of reference in the universe. "In the beginning GOD" – humans come after that and understanding THAT is the beginning of it all. Now this week we are adding on to that foundation; we are talking about the fact that human beings were created IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS of God. What in the world does that mean? And what happened to that identity and status when we fell into sin? And what happens to that identity and status when we are saved through the person and work of Christ? These are hugely important questions and we'll try to work our way through each of them as we reflect upon this foundational text. Hopefully you have your Bibles open to Genesis 1. I'll begin reading at verse 26. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

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. (Genesis 1:26-31 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Alright, the first question we need to ask as we reflect upon this text is this:

### **What Does It Mean To Be Image And Likeness Of God?**

The Hebrew words used here – *tzelem* and *demoth*, are often used in the Bible to refer to IDOLS or STATUES that might be set up to represent a pagan god, or even a King that is supposed to be worshipped as a god. So we remember the statue that Nebuchadnezzar set up of himself that everyone was supposed to bow down to. That statue was in the image and likeness of Nebuchadnezzar – it looked like him and it was supposed to represent him – it’s the same thing here. In some special way, we resemble and represent God within creation; but what exactly does that mean? It can’t mean that God is “man shaped” or that he has “facial hair” – God is a spirit and does not have a body like men – so there are a lot of things it can’t mean, but there are certain things the Bible seems to indicate it DOES mean, so let’s take a minute and think about those things. First of all I think we can safely say that to speak of human beings as the image and likeness of God refers to the fact that:

## **1. We are spiritually and morally sensitive**

Allen P. Ross is helpful here, he says:

“Humans have spiritual life, ethical and moral sensitivities, conscience, and the capacity to represent God.”<sup>1</sup>

Human beings have a bandwidth that allows them to TUNE in to aspects of God’s character and to MIMIC or imitate those things in their own character. That’s why in the Bible we hear God saying:

be holy, for I am holy. (Leviticus 11:44 ESV)

Human beings were created with the capacity to BEHOLD and REFLECT GOD, spiritually and morally speaking, in a way that animals were not. DOGS are not tuned in to issues of FAIRNESS, JUSTICE or EQUALITY. Might makes right in the world of dogs. The big dog eats first. The alpha male gets his choice of mates and the best bone from every kill. But human beings have the capacity to SEE and LIVE above that level. We are sensitive to how things SHOULD BE and we FEEL IT when things are out of alignment with what we see in the character of God. Seeing those things; feeling those things, is part of what sets us apart. It is part of what it means to be image and likeness of God.

Secondly, we are image and likeness of God in the sense that:

## **2. We are inherently social**

Genesis 1:27 says:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing: A Guide To The Study And Exposition Of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 112.

According to the Bible, being MALE and FEMALE is part of how we IMAGE GOD - now let me unpack that. I'm not saying that God is male and female. I'm saying that God is clearly revealed in this passage as existing in some kind of plurality and as enjoying some kind of internal relationship. Listen again to the verse that comes right BEFORE verse 27; verse 26:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ..." (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

We don't get a full theology of the Trinity here but we do see that there is an "US-NESS" about God and there is inner dialogue and relationship. Well, so it is with respect to human beings. Human beings were created to exist as MALE and FEMALE pairs.

Later we will be told that:

"It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18 ESV)

We'll come back to the whole male/female thing next week, but for now, I just want you to understand that HUMANS are essentially RELATIONAL BEINGS. We have LATERAL INPUT PORTS – just like we have VERTICAL input ports. We were created to engage with God and to be transformed by that – and we were created to engage LATERALLY with one another – and to be changed and transformed by that.

Again, this is something you HAVE TO UNDERSTAND to live well and wisely in the world. This is why the Apostle Paul says:

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV)

Human beings are not isolated entities; we are always plugged in and therefore we are always changing, in one direction or another. This is why prophets and leaders in the Bible get so worked up about mixed marriages. Last week in the RMM Bible Reading Plan we read one of the weirdest passages in the Old Testament. In Nehemiah 13 there is this scene where Nehemiah the Governor discovers that some Jewish men have married non-Jewish women, and he goes absolutely ballistic. The text says:

23 In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. 25 And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. 27 Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?” (Nehemiah 13:23-27 ESV)

Nehemiah understood that it was Solomon’s love for non-Jewish women that ultimately changed the trajectory of Jewish history. Why? Because WHO YOU LOVE IS WHAT YOU BELIEVE!! That’s what it means to be a human being! You are not an entirely free-thinking person. You receive input in your “God-port”, whether from God or from whatever idol you give authority to, and you receive input through your “PEOPLE-PORT” and no one speaks louder into your “PEOPLE-PORT” than the one you share your bed with.

That’s REALITY.

Who you love is what you believe – so to guard your mind, you have to guard your heart.

That’s wisdom. That’s making good choices because you know who you are and how you were created.

Alright, thirdly, we are image and likeness of God in the sense that we are able to create and multiply.

### **3. We are able to create**

Right after human beings are called image and likeness of God, the text goes on to say:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28 ESV)

Derek Kidner is great here, he says, commenting on this verse:

“To bless is to bestow not only a gift but a function ... and to do so with warm concern.”<sup>2</sup>

I love that! Kidner is saying that God gave us the GIFT of being able to make human beings AND the commission to do so – and all with warm concern.

Brothers and sisters, God has a WARM CONCERN for everything related to the trials and joys of raising a family.

Moms out there – God has a WARM concern for you as a mother. He wants you to know that you are doing important work. He wants you to know that he is eager to hear and respond to your mom prayers as you raise those precious little ones.

And moms to be – God has a warm concern for you as well. He knows how hard it is to bring children into this broken and fallen world. He knows that our bodies are groaning along with all creation. He has a warm concern for how this difficulty is weighing on your weary soul. You can go to him with your concerns and be sure of a sympathetic hearing.

Parents in general, be assured that God has a warm concern for all the challenges you face. He knows how hard it is to buy a home right now. He knows how hard it is to survive on one income. He cares about those things so if you pray for wisdom and if you pray for grace he will hear you and he will help you – because God wants you to BE AGAIN the people you were created and intended to be. That’s why he gives grace. That’s literally what grace is for – to lift us up out of the depths to which we have fallen so that we can be the people we were created and intended to be in the beginning – and you were created to be AN AMBASSADOR who is authorized to HAVE and RAISE UP other ambassadors. You are LIKE GOD in that sense – praise the Lord!

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<sup>2</sup>Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 56-57.

Fourthly, and following on from that, we are image and likeness of God in the sense that:

#### **4. We exercise authority**

Look at verse 28 again:

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.” (Genesis 1:28 ESV)

As image and likeness of God, human beings are told to SUBDUE and to exercise DOMINION. To subdue means to bring under management. In Genesis 2:15, in the zoomed in version of creation, it says that God put human beings in the garden of his creation and told them:

“to work it and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15 ESV)

This is often referred to as “the cultural mandate”. So, to be clear, human beings are not “primitivists”. We were not told to wander through creation without touching anything. We were told the opposite. We were told to represent God by IMPROVING IT. We were told to push the garden outwards. So we represent God when we domesticate animals. We represent God when we put metals together and make alloys. We represent God when we divert a river to fertilize a field. All these things can be done sinfully, but when we do them well we are fulfilling our function and calling to be IMAGE and LIKENESS OF GOD.

The word “dominion” of course means “a sphere of authority”, so we’re called to subdue the world AND to exercise authority within it. Human beings were created to be UNDER GOD and OVER EVERYTHING ELSE. We are Vice Regents. Our authority isn’t absolute, it is always in reference to God’s Word and it is always contained to specific relationships, but it is real and it is extensive. In fact it is more extensive than it may appear at present because we live in a time when the leadership capacity of human beings is greatly diminished, but in terms of our created capacity, our dominion is extensive – it extends to everything else that God created; in 1 Corinthians 6:3 Paul says that this extends even TO THE ANGELS. He says:

“Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” (1 Corinthians 6:3 ESV)

And why not? Angels are created things, so if humans are supposed to rule over all created things then human beings were supposed to rule over the angels. And we will. When we are restored we will rule over every created thing – including angels – under the overall authority of Christ. The Bible says that too; in 2 Timothy 2:12 it says:

“if we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12 ESV)

When creation is renewed, AFTER human beings have been healed and restored, we will be ruling and reigning over a variety of EXALTED creatures – up to and including the angels. That’s what it means for us to be IMAGE and LIKENESS of God!

Which, of course raises the question:

### **What Happened To The Image Of God In Us When We Fell?**

As we’ve just been talking about, CLEARLY we are not NOW the people we were created and intended to be. We were created to rule over the angels – but right now, obviously, we are not. There are all manner of things that we were created to do that we are currently unable to do as a result of our fallen condition. The picture at the end of Genesis 3 is pretty stark; Genesis 3:24 says:

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.  
(Genesis 3:24 ESV)

That is a vivid way of describing the current state of man. We are away from God and we no longer have access to the resources we need to fulfill our mission and calling – which raises the question: have we LOST the image and likeness of God as fallen creatures?

Thankfully the answer to that question appears to be no. In Genesis 9:6 – which comes AFTER the FALL and AFTER the FLOOD, God says to Noah that:



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

Anthony Hoekema draws out the significance of this verse saying:

“The reason that murder is here said to be such a heinous crime that it must be punished by death is that the man who has been murdered is someone who imaged God, reflected God, was like God, and represented God. ... To touch the image of God is to touch God himself; to kill the image of God is to do violence to God himself.”<sup>3</sup>

So human beings are *STILL* creatures of enormous dignity and worth – even though we have fallen away from God! Even the worst human being in the world – is still image and likeness of God! The death of a tyrant or a murderer may be necessary – as Genesis 9:6 clearly indicates, but it should never be celebrated and it should only be undertaken through careful, considered, and collective action on behalf of the community; that’s what is being authorized in Genesis 9:6.

The death of a human being is clearly a *SACRED* thing; an *AWFUL* thing and so this is why we need to be *HORRIFIED* by the rapid expansion of *MAID* in this country. We are talking about extending *MAID* to the mentally handicapped and to people experiencing depression and even potentially to the homeless and economically disadvantaged – that is to completely *DENY* the inherent dignity and worth of human beings created in the image and likeness of God. We are not authorized in Scripture to kill people so as to save money or so as to stabilize the health care system. There is only one exception to the rule “Thou shalt not kill” and that is to remove a killer from the community. We are way out of alignment here. As image and likeness of God – as spiritually sensitive creatures are you *FEELING* that brothers and sisters? As Christians we need to be salt and light in this conversation lest our country invite the judgment and wrath of Almighty God. We need to say a loud *NO* on this issue. We need to say a loud *NO* here and we need to say a loud *NO* to abortion, because human beings – no matter their condition and no matter their diminished capacity – are image and likeness of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created In God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 16.

Even after the fall – we are image and likeness of God. BUT – that is not to say that we are unaffected. Far from it. The fall has changed us in significant ways. We no longer resemble and represent God the way we were created to do. We are CRACKED MIRRORS now. John Calvin puts it very well, he says:

“although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that anything which remains is fearful deformity”<sup>4</sup>

Those are good reference points for us: we are not utterly effaced but we are fearfully deformed.

We used the analogy last week of SOLAR PANELS. Human beings are like cars powered by a giant solar panel on top – well here, Calvin is saying that our solar panel is covered in mud. It is not entirely effaced – some light is getting through, but not very much. And it is fearfully deformed. It is badly bent; it is very much out of alignment. It has been thoroughly cracked.

That is who we are as human beings.

We still hear from God – but it is like trying to hear God under water – or under mud. Everything is garbled; not much is getting through. And we still can receive grace – but we don’t receive as much we should because we are so far out of alignment.

That’s us on the other side of the fall.

And you will never understand human beings if you do not account for this dynamic. G.C. Berkouwer in his book on the image of God provides a bit of a wake up call for people in our generation; he says:

“The sciences which deal with certain aspects of man can make no more than a partial contribution to our understanding of man, and cannot unveil the secret of the whole man.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), paragraph 572.

<sup>5</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 29.

We need to hear that in our modern, therapeutic age. To be clear, I am NOT SAYING that psychology and psychiatry have NO VALUE. No, of course they have value. But as Berkouwer says here, they have LIMITED VALUE because, by and large, they do not take account of the fundamental relationship between human beings and God. Modern day therapists – if they are not believers – are like mechanics trying to fix the broken-down electric car on the side of the road. They are looking at the wheels, they are looking at the nav system, they are inspecting the windshield and the sound system and all of that is very interesting, and even very important – but unless you are dealing with the SOLAR PANEL and the fact of its effacement and deformity – you are wasting your time. You are rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. You are not addressing the fundamental problem. And the fundamental problem is that human beings are OUT OF relationship with God.

So very, quickly, because again we'll come back to this in greater detail in the future, I just want to ask the question:

### **What Happens To The Image Of God In Us When We Are Saved?**

That's what we need to know, and the Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians 3:9-10. He is speaking to new believers, and he says:

“you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” (Colossians 3:9-10 ESV)

So according to the Bible, when we come to Christ, we begin a process of renewal. And not just “renewal” however we conceive of it, it is renewal after the image of our Creator. Thomas Boston puts it this way, referring to the redeemed state of human beings as:

“the state of begun recovery of human nature”<sup>6</sup>

Isn't that good? I love that phrase “begun recovery” – that's fundamentally what it means to be saved! Think of it this way, ever since Genesis 3 human beings have been falling away from

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Boston, *Human Nature In Its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 203.

God. So imagine that we are chained to a heavy anchor and that anchor has been cast into a bottomless sea. We are being dragged down, down, down to the depths; away from God and away from our created capacity and glory. We are falling. But when we come to Christ – the chain is broken and the anchor falls away and we are FREE.

We are FREE and capable of growth and recovery.

That is what it means to be saved.

Listen again to those words you have heard here so many times – but listen now through the lens of all we’ve just talked about. Paul says:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18 ESV)

When we come to Christ the mud is wiped off – the veil is removed and our connection to God is restored. The chain is cut and we are free. We come back to life – like an appliance that everyone thought was dead and gone, but that only needed to be plugged back in to its power source – we ARE ALIVE AGAIN and in his grace, by his Spirit, we begin to heal, change and become.

By one degree of glory to the next – into the same image. The image of our Creator – gloriously and perfectly displayed in the person of Jesus Christ and imprinted on our hearts through the ministry of the Holy Spirit; thanks be to God.

Let’s pray together.