

**Made in God's Image**  
**Genesis 1:26–31**  
**September 30, 2012**

One of the major opponents to an understanding of the world through the eyes of divine creation or through intelligent design is Oxford professor Richard Dawkins. Part of his approach to battling creationists and intelligent design proponents is to brush off the serious theological and philosophical issues having to do with creation and human existence. Of primary importance in the entire debate is the “why” question regarding creation. Why do we exist? Why do we differ so much from animals?

Dawkins explains, “We humans have purpose on the brain. We find it hard to look at anything without wondering what it is “for,” what the motive for it is, or the purpose behind it.” Then he takes a stab at those who would dare to ask “why,” by explaining that the purpose behind the design of everything can be traced back to Darwinian natural selection. He tosses the “why” issues aside, explaining that nowadays “only the scientifically illiterate” continue to ask the why/purpose questions about human existence, although admitting that this includes the “absolute majority” of people.<sup>1</sup>

I would not expect Professor Dawkins to pay much attention to a reading of Genesis 1 that sets forth the basics of human purpose. For one reason, he has rejected the authority of Scripture and denied the existence of God the Creator. And another, he worships at the altar of Darwinism. As an idolater, I do not expect him to listen to what God’s Word has to say. Idolatry of any kind hardens the heart to hear and understand the truth of what God has spoken.

My concern in studying our text does not go back to Darwin to see how his theories match up with or disagree with the theological history of Genesis. Rather what I want to do is to make some simple observations from Moses’ record of the creation of man. Out of these observations we begin to get a better picture of WHY we exist and our PURPOSE in the world. Ultimately, Darwinism leaves humanity without purpose and without hope. Not surprisingly, in a culture where Darwin’s natural selection dominates education and media—being treated as fact rather than theory—violence, hate crimes, terrorism, racism, prejudice, and other wretched actions of one person toward another seem quite natural. Fallen humanity has no accountability if no Creator exists. Everyone doing what is right in his own eyes quite naturally follows no consciousness of purpose given by the Creator.

*Understanding that God created us in His image affects the way that we look at everything. We cannot view life as meaningless, in this case, nor can we be satisfied to pursue self-centered ends in life. How does creation in God’s image affect you?*

**1. God created all of humanity therefore all of humanity owes its existence and reason for being to the pleasure of God.**

The words arrest us and they should. “**Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’**” After walking through the opening story of creation, noting each day’s creation activity, on the sixth day, after creating living creatures after their kind, cattle and creeping things after their kind and beasts after their kind, creation

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 95–98.

reaches its zenith. God creates man in His image. The rest of the Bible is the story of God's relationship with humanity in all of its ups and downs and its ultimate purpose.

That God would create humanity in His image should affect the attitude of every person. For instance, if a Mr. Brown began to dream about starting a company, and eventually, that dream came into reality with Mr. Brown's actions, finances, and leadership, one would rightly expect those benefiting from the company to honor and revere Mr. Brown who brought the company into existence. Yet what happens in ordinary life does not seem to transfer to greater, eternal issues. We offer accolades to the Mr. Browns of the world who start businesses that help our livelihood or make life easier for us. But do we give great honor to the One who created us in His image?

*Divine contemplation.* There's a noticeable change in the narrative when it gets to the creation of mankind. In verse 20, God speaks, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth . . . ," and it happened. Verse 21 is a commentary on the declaration of verse 20. In verse 24, the same pattern is given. "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so." Special attention is given to the uniqueness of each creature created. "God made the beasts of the earth *after their kind*, and the cattle *after their kind*, and everything that creeps on the ground *after its kind*."

But there's a pause in verse 26, as we find the Creator contemplating the zenith of His creation. "**Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.'**" Notice that He did not say, 'let us make man *after its kind*,' as though to lump humanity in with the rest of the animal kingdom. None of the animals or birds or sea creatures was created in God's image or according to His likeness—none of them! This sets man apart from the rest of creation so that comparing a human being to any animal denigrates mankind and his Creator.

The use of the name *Elohim*, a plural title for God, expresses what some OT scholars call a plural of majesty or plural of fullness. Here we find a hint of Trinitarian contemplation. There's no explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity nor is there a statement of it, just a hint by the language that will be filled out particularly in the New Testament. This God who is plural in His persons and singular in His being—One God in Three Divine Persons—contemplated the final work in the six-days of creation. Then He decided to make man in His image, according to His likeness.

Why is there such a distinction between making the cattle according to its kind and making man in the divine image? First, God's declaration shows how significant every person is in God's sight. Everyone, despite the effects of the fall, continues to bear something of the divine image. Genesis 9:6 reminds us that the fall did not erase the divine image in man but only diminished and tarnished it, for after the flood Noah was warned about taking human life, "For in the image of God He made man." So, every person finds his purpose, not in what he does or what he looks like, but in relationship to the God who made him in His image.

Second, the creation in God's image will ultimately come to fruition when He who is the visible image of the invisible God, Jesus Christ, comes into the world in order to restore the image of God in its fullness in all of the redeemed. While man is "**made in the image of God,**" Jesus Christ "is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4). While in this world we bear the image of the earthy, as Paul told the Corinthians, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the day will come when "we will also bear the image of the

heavenly,” with resurrection bodies that perfectly mirror the divine image found in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:48).

Third, in an era when animals represented deities, as did the sun, moon, and stars, and other aspects of the creation, God shows all of the rest of creation as *lesser* in comparison to man created in His image. The crowning act of creation comes in that last act on the sixth day when God made man in His image, according to His likeness.

So, one would be foolish to worship the creature and the creation rather than the Creator. Yet even today in animistic cultures, creatures and aspects of the creation are regularly worshiped. And in the sophisticated Western culture, Americans bow at the altar of the created order as nature worshipers rather than honoring and serving the Creator through Jesus Christ. As the crown of creation, we must turn to the One in whose image we’ve been made to find our purpose and to offer our worship and submission.

## **2. To be created in the image of God, according to His likeness sets humans apart unto relationship with the Lord.**

For centuries, students of Genesis have debated the meaning of “**image**” and “**likeness**.” Some said that in the fall, “likeness” to God was lost while the “image” was retained to distinguish humanity from animals. Augustine considered “image” as a reference to man’s “being,” having to do with memory, knowledge, and will. The Reformers rejected this distinction between image and likeness, while understanding the image of God pointing primarily to relationship to Him. Unlike some of the early church fathers, the Reformers considered the “image of God” in man to have been “mortally wounded in the fall, which required the intervening grace of the Spirit for salvation.”<sup>2</sup> Instead of two facets in this act of creating man, “**likeness**” simply further explains “**image of God**.” But what does the image of God mean?

I found the discussions in Kenneth Matthews’s commentary on Genesis 1 and John Collins study on Genesis 1–4 to be most helpful.<sup>3</sup> Collins identifies three views on the meaning of “image of God,” concluding that rather than taking one view over the other, it’s best to consider all three to fill out our understanding.

First, traditionally, many have thought of the image of God as referring to man as a *resemblance* of God. Obviously, this does not mean that we resemble Him physically since God is spirit (John 4:23–24). This resemblance view is *ontological*, that is, it has to do with man’s essence or being. There’s something to this for we understand who we are only with reference to the One who created us. Otherwise, we can think of ourselves as just sophisticated and domesticated animals, similar to what a typical Darwinist would think. But being made in God’s image will not allow such a low view of man, which leads to, as in the case of Princeton ethicist Peter Singer, thinking that terminating life for any number of reasons—in the womb and out of the womb—is valid. If we do not have our *being*—who we are—as resembling God, then Singer’s viewpoint has validity.

Second, the next aspect of the image of God has to do with our being *representatives* of God. This is especially indicated by the command that follows the declaration of man in God’s image: “**and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the**

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC: 1A; Nashville: B&H, 1996), 164ff.

<sup>3</sup> C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2006), 61ff. I’m particularly borrowing Collins’ three helpful categories to explain this. See his study for more details.

**sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”** In other words, as representatives of the Creator, we have delegated responsibility to exercise wise stewardship and dominion over the creation. Psalm 8 expresses this, as David marvels that God would make man a little lower than Himself, crowning him with glory and majesty. Verses 6–8 explains his marvel: “You made him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas.”

In this sense, being made in God’s image and likeness means that He has placed us as vice-regents over the creation. This does not call for exploitation but on wise, God-dependent, and God-glorifying stewardship over all the created order.

Third, the image of God also points to *relationship* with God. The relationship runs vertically and horizontally. Man has relationship to God through Christ. And man has relationship with the human community, particularly as he understands relationships through the lens of the gospel of Christ. The reiteration of the creation in Genesis 1:27 indicates this. **“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”** So man relates Godward and toward one another as image-bearers. Understanding the image of God includes both relationships.

I would add a fourth category for understanding the image of God. As those created in His image, mankind is to be a *reflection of God*. We’re not the originator of the character and traits of God. Those come from Him. We reflect the glory that shines from His own character and being.

The New Testament picks up on this in significant ways, for apart from the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the marred image of God in a person continues to be blurred. John explained that in Jesus Christ the Incarnate God, we see in His humanity the divine glory (John 1:14). It is something of that glory that those who put their trust in Jesus Christ begin to reflect. For instance, Ephesians 2:10 explains that we’re God’s workmanship, as those who have faith in Christ, “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we would walk in them.” Those good works reflect the divine image. He goes on to pray that the Ephesian believers would “be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:16–17). So, the One *who is the image of God* (Col 1:15), now indwelling those whom He has redeemed through His bloody death, begins to reflect something of that image through the frail vessels of redeemed humanity.

Then Paul goes on to explain the work taking place in our sanctification (Eph 4:22–24). We are to lay aside the old, corrupt practices and patterns of our unregenerate life, and we’re to be constantly renewed in the spirit of our minds. “And put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Here is the very essence of the divine image: righteousness and holiness of the truth reflecting the Creator and Redeemer in those saved by grace through Christ.

The ultimate aim in redemption takes us beyond a gradual restoration to the image of God in fallen human beings to glorious likeness to Jesus Christ. John writes, “Beloved, 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*” (1 John 4:2). When we see this played out in the book of Revelation, we find robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14). We find a bride made ready to join the Lamb

of God—the groom—at the heavenly marriage feast, indicating that the image of God has been fully restored to make the bride worthy of the Lord Jesus (Rev 19:7–9). Then we come to the New Heaven and Earth, as every vestige of the fall is totally removed so that nothing diminishes the image of God, now evident in the entire church gathered in the Lord's presence (Rev 21–22).

Here's how this comes into focus in our daily lives. In the work of Jesus in His death and resurrection, as the rightful king over all creation, He “has established a beachhead in his territory and calls on his subjects to press his claims even farther in creation,” as Al Wolters explains. The day will come when the beachhead will give way to the complete victory of His rule over the creation in the New Heaven and Earth. The image of God, tarnished and diminished in the fall, but now reflected in increasing degrees in those redeemed by Christ will be resplendent and fully restored in His presence.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, as we wait for the blessed hope of Christ's return, we are to resemble the Lord in our character and actions, represent Him as good stewards over the creation, grow in relationship to Him and to one another, and reflect His image of righteousness and holiness. In a nutshell, our entire sanctification consumes the process of restoring the image of God in fallen people through the gracious work of grace in Jesus Christ.

### **3. The reiteration of God creating man in His image intends to draw our attention to Him so that we might bow to Him as King.**

Could verse 27 make it clearer? **“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”** Despite the clarity, mankind has lost sight of creation in God's image, preferring to pursue degenerated interests rather than finding our purpose in relationship to the Creator. Think of the recent news headlines of rioting and killing in the Middle East, workplace murders in Minneapolis, acts of racism, greed, and a thousand other acts against fellow man. These evidence a total ignoring of all humanity created in God's image. For if we believe that our fellow man is created in God's image, it changes the way that we relate to others. Our desire to honor the Creator will be evident in the way that we treat those created in His image.

Also, it is important that we note the distinctions in human sexuality in this creation statement. The Lord made men and women with equality in being and standing with God. The attitudes of male chauvinism and radical feminism have no place in the way that God made us in His image. Instead, equality between the sexes exists in God's sight. But equality does not mean that men and women are the same in terms of their roles and functions. *Complementarianism* best describes how God has created and designed men *to be men* and women *to be women*, with both sexes delighting in the roles and responsibilities entrusted to them by the Lord.<sup>5</sup> A man cannot find fulfillment apart from pursuing the God-designed pattern for men, just as a woman cannot find fulfillment and purpose apart from the God-designed pattern for women. Our culture seems to be rushing to blur the beautiful distinctions and roles the Creator entrusted to men as men and women as women. We must stand firmly in glorying in what God has designed!

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<sup>4</sup> Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 74–78.

<sup>5</sup> For helpful material on this please see the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood website at [www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org).

Realizing that we are divine image bearers through the redeeming work of Jesus and the regenerating work of the Spirit humbles us before the Lord. How amazing that He would create us in His image, find that image damaged by the fall and our rebellion against Him, and *yet* the Lord pursues us so that He might restore His image in us through Jesus Christ. Think of the Gadarean demoniac, screaming day and night, running naked through the ancient graveyard, and then Jesus delivers and transforms him. The image of God so faint as to be virtually unrecognizable, suddenly blazed with the beauty and dignity of a new life recreated in Jesus! He does no less in each one He saves. Let us bow to Him as King of all and pray that the restoration of His image in us will display His glory and grace.

### **Conclusion**

To be made in God's image is no minor thing. Nor can we assume that God's purpose for humanity has been defeated in the fall. Rather, creation in God's image points to what God restores in us through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. And with that restoration comes renewed responsibilities to reflect the One in whose image we are recreated in through Jesus Christ.

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### **For More Consideration**

#### **(A) God has charged mankind to be vice-regents over creation and as stewards to Him who created the world.**

There have been some who have accused Christians and the biblical mandate of having dominion over the creation as the reason the environment has been polluted, tarnished, and in some ways destroyed. Yet nothing could be further from the point of the rule entrusted to mankind. **"Let them rule"** does not mean 'let them exploit' or 'let them destroy' but rather to rule as those entrusted as managers of the creation by the Creator.

Let's face it: there are ways that we can improve our stewardship of the environment. We are to take care of the resources that God has given to us, managing them as those who will give an account. But some in the Christian community, well-meaning I'm sure, have taken this too far. One writer, whose book on the mission of God and the church's mission under God, has gone so far as to say that environmental protection is part of the Great Commission! As you can imagine, he does some theological gyrations to get to that point! But we must reject such fallacies while embracing good care for the creation.

Our model for creation care is found in the Creator. When we see the beauty of what takes place in the six days of creation, with the refrain, "And God saw that it was good," we must evaluate how we treat the resources entrusted to us, asking, "Would my stewardship have the divine declaration of "good" on it?"

#### **(B) God, unlike the pagan deities of Moses' day, provides for humanity and the world.**

As mentioned in our first study in Genesis, the common pattern for the gods and goddesses among those outside the community of believers from the earliest times and stretching into our own day, is to enslave their devotees and require them to bring them food. That's why we find the practice of worshipers bringing food items to offer before the images of their gods. But in contrast, The Lord blessed the creation, including mankind, giving **"every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed,"** as food for mankind and every green plant for the animals and birds. Does that give the parameters for eating? No, but it does make the point that God provides for His creation.

When we look at the abundance of food produced globally, it is an amazing thing. Yet we also realize that the fall affected food production, evidenced by exploitation, abuse, disasters, famines, blight, greed, and a host of other things. The creation, as Paul explains in Romans 8:18–25, waits for the final redemption when all things lost and disfigured in the fall will be restored. Since there's a future marriage supper of the Lamb when all things are restored, then be assured that the productivity of the restored creation will be beyond anything that we can imagine! Meanwhile, let us glory in the graciousness of our God who provides for us!