

By God's Definition: Genesis 1:26-31

Main Idea: Humanity does not determine its own identity, purpose, or definition of goodness. God, our Creator, has already defined who we are, why we exist, and where true flourishing is found.

I. God's Image | Genesis 1:26-27

Verses 26-31 introduces the creation of humanity to the creation account. The creation of humanity marks the climax of God's creative work. Unlike the animals, plants, and heavenly bodies, mankind is uniquely created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). **This does not mean that humanity physically resembles God, but that we were created to know Him, reflect His character, and represent His rule within creation.** David reflects on this privilege in Psalm 8, marveling that God has crowned humanity "with glory and honor" and entrusted them with dominion over the works of His hands (Ps. 8:4-8). Because every person bears God's image, human dignity is not earned but given. Scripture consistently grounds the value of human life in God's creative work rather than human ability. After the fall, God still forbids murder because mankind is made in His image (Gen. 9:6). James similarly condemns the hypocrisy of praising God while cursing people who are "made in the likeness of God" (James 3:9). **No person is beneath our compassion, because every person has been made in the image of God.** The unborn child, the elderly person, the disabled individual, the political opponent, and the difficult neighbor all possess equal dignity because all bear the mark of their Creator.

This doctrine also shapes how believers understand identity. Modern culture often teaches that identity is discovered by looking inward and defining oneself according to personal desires and feelings. Scripture presents the opposite pattern. Adam did not define himself; God defined him. **Humanity receives its identity from the Creator rather than constructing it independently.** When Paul preached in Athens, he argued that humanity is God's offspring and therefore should not seek ultimate meaning in idols fashioned by human imagination (Acts 17:24-29). Yet Genesis also points us toward a problem. We were created to reflect God, but sin has distorted that image. We no longer reflect God as we were intended to. This is why the gospel is not only about forgiveness. It is also about restoration. Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), the perfect man who succeeded where Adam failed. Through union with Christ, believers are being renewed "after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:10) and transformed into Christ's likeness by the work of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). **Sanctification is ultimately the restoration of broken image-bearers into what God originally designed them to be.**

To Ponder:

1. If all people bear God's image, what is the difference between being created in God's image and being saved by God's grace? And what are the implications of there being a difference between these two?
2. How should the truth that every person bears God's image affect the way Christians engage with people whose beliefs, lifestyles, or values strongly differ from their own? (Think beyond "We have to love them.")

II. God's Mission | Genesis 1:26,28

God also gives humanity a purpose. Adam and Eve are commanded to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Humanity was never intended to be passive observers within creation. **God's image-bearers were commissioned to cultivate the earth, steward its resources, and extend God's rule throughout the world.** Stewardship emphasizes responsible management of what belongs to someone else. Psalm 115 reminds us that while "the heavens are the LORD's heavens," He has entrusted the earth to humanity (Ps. 115:16). This stewardship is not ownership. Everything ultimately belongs to God (Ps. 24:1). **Humanity's task is to manage God's world according to God's purposes.** This includes our work, families, resources, abilities, relationships, and opportunities.

Genesis also helps correct a common misunderstanding about work. Before sin entered the world, Adam was placed in the garden "to work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Work is not part of the curse; frustrating labor is. **Meaningful work was part of God's good design from the beginning.** In fact,

work is one of the primary ways humanity fulfills its calling as God's image-bearers and stewards within creation. Through cultivating, building, organizing, serving, creating, and caring for others, people reflect something of God's own wisdom, creativity, and provision. **This means that our daily responsibilities are not distractions from serving God but opportunities to honor Him through faithful stewardship.** Every act of work can become an act of worship when done unto the Lord (Col. 3:23-24).

The creation mandate also helps us understand God's larger purposes throughout Scripture. Humanity was commanded to fill the earth with image-bearers who would know, worship, and glorify God. Though sin distorted this, God's purpose never changed. He promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his offspring (Gen. 12:1-3). The Psalmist prayed that God's saving power would be known among all nations (Ps. 67:1-7). Christ then commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). What began in Genesis finds its fulfillment in Revelation, where a redeemed multitude from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation worships before God's throne (Rev. 7:9-10). **The Great Commission is not disconnected from Genesis; it is God's redemptive answer to humanity's failure to fulfill its original mission.**

To Ponder:

3. If everything ultimately belongs to God (Ps. 24:1), what does that imply about our ownership of time, money, possessions, talents, and opportunities? How would your daily routines change if you viewed yourself primarily as a steward of God's resources rather than the owner of your own life?

III. God's Blessing | Genesis 1:28-31

The first interaction Adam and Eve have with God after receiving their identity and mission is receiving His blessing. Before they have accomplished anything, God blesses them and provides abundantly for their needs (Gen. 1:28-30). Creation begins with divine generosity. This stands in sharp contrast to the false religions of the ancient world. Pagan gods were often portrayed as needy and dependent upon human service. The God of Scripture lacks nothing (Ps. 50:9-12; Acts 17:24-25). **God is completely satisfied in Himself and gives out of generosity.** He creates not because He needs humanity but because He delights in displaying His goodness. The Psalmist declares that God opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:15-16). Because every blessing ultimately comes from God, gratitude becomes one of the defining characteristics of faithful living. James reminds believers that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). **The Christian life is marked by recognizing God's generosity and responding with worship.** Yet Romans 1 identifies ingratitude as one of humanity's fundamental sins, describing people who knew God but "did not honor him as God or give thanks to him" (Rom. 1:21). The generosity displayed in Genesis ultimately points forward to an even greater gift. Paul argues that if God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, believers can trust His goodness in every area of life (Rom. 8:32). **Creation reveals God's generosity, but redemption reveals it most fully.** The God who provided a world for Adam is the same God who provided a Savior for sinners.

The chapter concludes with God's declaration that creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). This came before Adam and Eve had built anything, accomplished anything, or proven anything. **God's approval was rooted in His design rather than their performance.** This truth challenges the performance-driven culture in which we live. Many people spend their lives trying to establish their worth through achievements, possessions, appearance, popularity, or success. Yet Scripture teaches that goodness is defined by God rather than earned through human accomplishment.

To Ponder:

4. God has blessed his creation abundantly and Romans 1:21 identifies a lack of gratitude as a root, foundational sin rather than just a minor bad attitude. Why do you think a failure to give thanks is so spiritually destructive?
5. Looking back at your past week, would someone observing your thoughts and words say your life was marked more by gratitude or complaint? What are some habits you can begin that will help you practice God honoring gratitude?