



Week 13 – Origin of Man

This week we focus on the pinnacle of God’s creative activity, his creation of human beings, both male and female, to be more like him than anything else he has made.

Some people today object to ever using the word “man” to refer to the human race in general (including both men and women), because it is claimed that such usage is insensitive to women.

Those who make this objection would prefer that we only use “gender neutral” terms such as “humanity,” “humankind,” “human beings,” or “persons” to refer to the human race.

Genesis 5: 1 ... When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.

The Hebrew term translated “Man” is ’ādām, the same term used for the name of Adam, and the same term that is sometimes used of man in distinction from woman.

(Gen. 2: 22, 25; 3:12; Eccl. 7: 28)

Therefore the practice of using the same term to refer (1) to male human beings and (2) to the human race generally is a practice that originated with God himself, and we should not find it objectionable or insensitive.

1. The theological issue is whether there is a suggestion of male leadership or headship in the family from the beginning of creation. The fact that God did not choose to call the human race “woman,” but “man,” probably has some significance for understanding God’s original plan for men and women.

2. Of course, this question of the name we use to refer to the race is not the only factor in that discussion, but it is one factor, and our use of language in this regard does have some significance in the discussion of male-female roles today.

B. Why Was Man Created?

God Did Not Need to Create Man, Yet He Created Us for His Own Glory.

Since there was perfect love and fellowship among members of the Trinity for all eternity (*John 17: 5, 24*), God did not create us because he was lonely or because he needed fellowship with other persons— God did not need us for any reason.

Nevertheless, God created us for his own glory.

In our treatment of his independence we noted that God speaks of his sons and daughters from the ends of the earth as those “whom I created for my glory”

Isaiah 43:7 “everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

Therefore,

1 Corinthians 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

This fact guarantees that our lives are significant. When we first realize that God did not need to create us and does not need us for anything, we could conclude that our lives have no importance at all.

But Scripture tells us that we were created to glorify God, indicating that we are important to God himself.

This is the final definition of genuine importance or significance to our lives: If we are truly important to God for all eternity, then what greater measure of importance or significance could we want?

What Is Our Purpose in Life?

The fact that God created us for his own glory determines the correct answer to the question, “What is our purpose in life?”

Our purpose must be to fulfill the reason that God created us: to glorify him.

When we are speaking with respect to God himself, that is a good summary of our purpose.

But when we think of our own interests, we make the happy discovery that we are to enjoy God and take delight in him and in our relationship to him.

Psalms 16:11 You (God) make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Fullness of joy is found in knowing God and delighting in the excellence of his character.

To be in his presence, to enjoy fellowship with him, is a greater blessing than anything that can be imagined.

Psalm 84:1 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! 2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

And as we glorify God and enjoy him, Scripture tells us that he rejoices in us.

Zephaniah 3: 17 The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

This understanding of the doctrine of the creation of man has very practical results.

When we realize that God created us to glorify him, and when we start to act in ways that fulfill that purpose, then we begin to experience an intensity of joy in the Lord that we have never before known.

When we add to that the realization that God himself is rejoicing in our fellowship with him, our joy becomes:

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

Someone might object that it is wrong for God to seek glory for himself in creating man.

But when God takes glory to himself, from whom is he robbing glory?

Is there anyone who deserves glory more than he does? Certainly not! He is the Creator, he made all things, and he deserves all glory. He is worthy of receiving glory.

Man may not seek glory for himself, but in this case what is wrong for man is right for God, because he is the Creator. It is right, not wrong, that he be glorified— in fact, if he did not receive glory from all creatures in the universe, that would be horribly wrong!

The twenty-four elders around God's throne continually sing,

Revelation 4:11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

When we begin to appreciate the nature of God as the infinitely perfect Creator who deserves all praise, then:

Mark 12: 30 ... you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Man in the Image of God

Out of all the creatures God made, only one creature, man, is said to be made “in the image of God.”

What does that mean?

We may use the following definition: The fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God.

When God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1: 26), the meaning is that God plans to make a creature similar to himself.

Both the Hebrew word for “image” (tselem) and the Hebrew word for “likeness” (demût) refer to something that is similar but not identical to the thing it represents or is an “image” of. The word image can also be used of something that represents something else.

Theologians have spent much time attempting to specify one characteristic of man, or a very few, in which the image of God is primarily seen.

Some have thought that the image of God consists in:

- ❖ man’s intellectual ability
- ❖ others in his power to make moral decisions and willing choices
- ❖ Others referred to man’s original moral purity
- ❖ or his creation as male and female
- ❖ or his dominion over the earth

In this discussion it would be best to focus attention primarily on the meanings of the words “image” and “likeness.”

When we realize that the Hebrew words for “image” and “likeness” simply informed the original readers that man was like God, and would in many ways represent God, much of the controversy over the meaning of “image of God” is seen to be a search for too narrow and too specific a meaning.

When Scripture reports that God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ” (Gen. 1: 26), it simply would have meant to the original readers, “Let us make man to be like us and to represent us.”

The fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God in the following but not exclusive ways: intellectual ability, moral purity, spiritual nature, dominion over the earth, creativity, ability to make ethical choices, and immortality, and much much more!!

This list does not do justice to the totality of how man is “like God”: the rest of Scripture fills in more details to explain this.

In fact, as we read the rest of Scripture, we realize that a full understanding of man’s likeness to God would require a full understanding of who God is in his being and in his actions and a full understanding of who man is and what he does.

The more we know about God and man the more similarities we will recognize, and the more fully we will understand what Scripture means when it says that man is in the image of God.

The Fall

God’s Image Is Distorted but Not Lost.

We might wonder whether man could still be thought to be like God after he sinned.

This question is answered quite early in Genesis where God gives Noah the authority to establish the death penalty for murder among human beings just after the flood:

God says:

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

Even though men are sinful, there is still enough likeness to God remaining in them that to murder another person is to attack the part of creation that most resembles God, and it betrays an attempt or desire to attack God himself.

Man is still in God’s image.

The New Testament says:

James 3:9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

However, since man has sinned, he is certainly not as fully like God as he was before. His moral purity has been lost and his sinful character certainly does not reflect God’s holiness.

His intellect is corrupted by falsehood and misunderstanding; his speech no longer continually glorifies God; his relationships are often governed by selfishness rather than love, and so forth.

Though man is still in the image of God, in every aspect of life some parts of that image have been distorted or lost.

Ecclesiastes 7: 29 See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

After the fall, then, we are still in God's image— we are still like God and we still represent God— but the image of God in us is distorted ; we are less fully like God than we were before the entrance of sin.

Therefore it is important that we understand the full meaning of the image of God not simply from observation of human beings as they currently exist, but from the biblical indications of the nature of Adam and Eve when God created them and when all that God had made was "very good" (Gen. 1: 31).

The true nature of man in the image of God was also seen in the earthly life of Christ.

The full measure of the excellence of our humanity will not be seen again in life on earth until Christ returns and we have obtained all the benefits of the salvation he earned for us.

Redemption in Christ

Progressive Recovering of More of God's Image.

Colossians 3: 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

As we gain in true understanding of God, his Word, and his world, we begin to think more and more of the thoughts that God himself thinks.

In this way we are "renewed in knowledge" and we become more like God in our thinking.

This is a description of the ordinary course of the Christian life.

So Paul also can say:

2 Corinthians 3:18 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.

Throughout this life, as we grow in Christian maturity we grow in greater likeness to God. More particularly, we grow in likeness to Christ in our lives and in our character.

God has redeemed us so that we might be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8: 29) and thus be exactly like Christ in our moral character.

At Christ's Return

Complete Restoration of God's Image.

The amazing promise of the New Testament is that just as we have been like Adam (subject to death and sin), we shall also be like Christ (morally pure, never subject to death again).

1 Corinthians 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

The full measure of our creation in the image of God is not seen in the life of Adam who sinned, nor is it seen in our lives now, for we are imperfect.

But the New Testament emphasizes that God's purpose in creating man in his image was completely realized in the person of Jesus Christ.

He himself "... is the image of God " (2 Cor. 4: 4)

"He is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1: 15).

"When he appears we shall be like him" (1 John 3: 2).

Specific Aspects of Our Likeness to God.

Though we have argued above that it would be difficult to define all the ways in which we are like God, we can nevertheless mention several aspects of our existence that show us to be more like God than all the rest of creation.

Moral Aspects:

1. We are creatures who are morally accountable before God for our actions.
2. We have an inner sense of right and wrong that sets us apart from animals
3. We have a behavior that is holy and righteous before him, but, by contrast, our unlikeness to God is reflected whenever we sin.

Spiritual Aspects:

1. We have not only physical bodies but also immaterial spirits, and we can therefore act in ways that are significant in the immaterial, spiritual realm of existence.
2. We have a spiritual life that enables us to relate to God as persons, to pray and praise him, and to hear him speaking his words to us.
3. We have immortality; we will not cease to exist but will live forever.

Mental Aspects:

1. We have the ability to reason and think logically and learn that sets us apart from the animal world.
2. Our use of complex, abstract language sets us far apart from the animals
3. Another mental difference between humans and animals is that we have an awareness of the distant future, even an inward sense that we will live beyond the time of our physical death, a sense that gives many people a desire to attempt to be right with God before they die.
4. Our likeness to God is also seen in our human creativity in areas such as art, music, and literature, and in scientific and technological inventiveness.
5. In the area of emotions, our likeness to God is seen in a large difference in degree and complexity of emotions.
6. We are able to develop deeply complex community structures at various levels.
7. Marriage itself reflects the nature of God in the fact that as men and women we have equality in importance but difference in roles from the time that God created us.
8. Man is like God also in his relationship to the rest of creation. Specifically, man has been given the right to rule over the creation and when Christ returns will even be given authority to sit in judgment over angels.
9. Our physical bodies in various ways reflect something of God's own character as well. Moreover, much physical movement and demonstration of God-given skill comes about through the use of our body. But even though our physical bodies should in no way be taken to imply that God has a physical body, are there still some ways in which our bodies reflect something of God's own character and thereby constitute part of what it means to be created in the image of God?
10. The God-given physical ability to bear and raise children who are like ourselves is a reflection of God's own ability to create human beings who are like himself.

We should not say that only man reflects any likeness to God at all, for in one way or another all of creation reflects some likeness to God.

But it is still important to recognize that only man, out of all of creation, is so like God that he can be said to be "in the image of God."

Because of Christ we can change.

Our appreciation of the ways in which we are like God can be enhanced by the realization that, unlike the rest of God's creation, we have an ability to grow to become more like God throughout our lives.

Our moral sense can be more highly developed through study of Scripture and prayer. Our moral behavior can reflect more and more the holiness of God.

Our spiritual life can be enriched and deepened.

Our use of reason and language can become more accurate and truthful and more honoring to God.

Our sense of the future can become intensified as we grow in our hope of living with God forever. Our future existence can be enriched as we lay up treasures in heaven and seek for increased heavenly reward.

Our ability to rule over the creation can be extended by faithful use of the gifts God has given us.

Our faithfulness to the God-given purposes for our creation as men and women can be increased as we follow biblical principles in our families.

Our creativity can be employed in ways that are more and more pleasing to God.

Our emotions can be more and more conformed to the pattern of Scripture so that we become more like David, a man after God's own heart.

Our interpersonal harmony in our families and in the church can reflect more and more the unity that exists among the persons in the Trinity.

As we consciously seek to grow into greater likeness to God in all these areas, we also demonstrate an ability that itself sets us apart from the rest of creation.

Our Great Dignity as Bearers of God's Image.

It would be good for us to reflect on our likeness to God more often.

It will probably amaze us to realize that when the Creator of the universe wanted to create something "in his image," something more like himself than all the rest of creation, he made us.

This realization will give us a profound sense of dignity and significance as we reflect on the excellence of all the rest of God's creation.

But we are more like our Creator than any of these things.

We are the culmination of God's infinitely wise and skillful work of creation.

Even though sin has greatly marred that likeness, we nonetheless now reflect much of it and shall even more as we grow in likeness to Christ.

Yet we must remember that even fallen, sinful man has the status of being in God's image. Every single human being, no matter how much the image of God is marred by sin, or illness, or weakness, or age, or any other disability, still has the status of being in God's image and therefore must be treated with the dignity and respect that is due to God's image-bearer.

Things to Mull:

1. According to Scripture, what should be the major purpose of your life?
2. If you consider the major commitments or goals of your life at the present time (with respect to friendships, marriage, education, job, use of money, church relationships, etc.), are you acting as though your goal were the one that Scripture specifies? Or do you have some other goals that you have acted upon (perhaps without consciously deciding to do so)?
3. As you think about the pattern of most of your days, do you think that God delights in you and rejoices over you?
4. How does it make you feel to think that you, as a human being, are more like God than any other creature in the universe? How does that knowledge make you want to act?
5. Do you think that there are any more intelligent, more Godlike creatures anywhere else in the universe?
6. What does the fact that Jesus became a man rather than some other kind of creature say about the importance of human beings in God's sight?
7. Do you think that God has made us so that we become more happy or less happy when we grow to become more like him?
8. As you look over the list of ways in which we can be more like God, can you name one or two areas in which growth in likeness to God has given you increasing joy in your life? In which areas would you now like to make more progress in likeness to God?

Bibliography:

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