

## **“Image Bearers” (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:4-25)**

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*Genesis 1:26–31 (ESV)*

<sup>26</sup> *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.”*

<sup>27</sup> *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

<sup>28</sup> *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.”<sup>1</sup>*

Who are we? That’s quite an important question. Granted, you’re probably not walking around every day thinking, Who am I? But at some point in our lives, we all need to think about that. One of the most important questions that people are discussing now is, What are humans? Again, people aren’t actually saying those words. But think about all that’s going on lately. In the news, there’s been controversy surrounding Planned Parenthood. Besides performing over 320,000 abortions every year, they appear to be trading tissue of aborted babies for money. This issue raises the question of human rights and the rights of the unborn. Another controversial issue surrounds gender, sexuality, and marriage. Is gender the same as biological sex, or is it not? Is gender fluid? And what about marriage? Is there a fixed definition of marriage, or is marriage simply what we make of it? Last week, there was an awful shooting at Umpqua Community College in Oregon. This tragedy rightly caused outrage. But people were almost as outraged three months ago when Cecil, a lion, was killed in Zimbabwe. I think I even saw some people calling for the death of the American dentist, Walter Palmer, who killed Cecil. Should the death of an animal outrage us more than the deaths of unborn humans? Who are we? How should we value human life? These are important questions that need to be answered.

We can’t know the purpose of our lives if we don’t know why we exist. We can’t know how to live unless we know what we were made for. We can’t know how we should live with each other if we don’t know these answers.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise notes, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Today, we'll see that the beginning of the Bible shows us that God created humans in his image. That means that humans were created to represent God, to reflect his greatness. Humans were made in God's likeness, which means they are supposed to relate rightly to God. Humans were supposed to serve God as his royal priests, coming under his word by obeying his word. And God made men and women to complement each other, to marry, and to produce offspring.

To begin, let's read Genesis 1:26-28:

<sup>26</sup> 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."

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> 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."

Last week, I said that Genesis 1 shows that God made the world to be his temple, his dwelling place where he meets his people and where they worship him. Moses wrote Genesis at some point after the Israelites came out of Egypt, on their way to the Promised Land of Canaan. Moses and the Israelites were familiar with Egyptian stories of gods and temples, and Moses surely was familiar with other stories from surrounding nations. In the ancient Near East, when a temple of a god was built, images of that god were put inside the temple. These images were made to represent that temple's god. So, when one entered a pagan temple, they would see a statue representing a god.<sup>2</sup> But in Israel's temple and all in all of Israel's worship, there were no idols. There were no statues or paintings that represented the one true God. In fact, the second commandment prohibited idol the creation and worship of idols (Exod. 20:4-6). We might ask, Why couldn't Israelites make a statue that represented God? The answer is that they were made in God's image. They, and all humans, were made to represent God. We were made to reflect God's character traits.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "If one were to enter a pagan temple, passing through the courtyard, and through the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies, what would one find there? An image representing one of the forces of nature." Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 190.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

In the ancient Near East, images were also related to kings. The king of Egypt was supposed to represent god on earth. “The king is the image of God because he has a relationship to the deity as the son of god and a relationship to the world as ruler for the god.”<sup>4</sup> So when God created people, it was his way of saying, “All of this belongs to me, and these people represent me. They will rule over the world as long as they come under my rule.”

Genesis 1 also says that God created man and woman in his likeness. A few chapters later, in Genesis 5:1-3, we read,

<sup>1</sup>This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. <sup>2</sup>Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. <sup>3</sup>When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

This implies that when God made Adam and Eve, the first humans, in his image and likeness, they were meant to be his children. They were supposed to relate to God as obedient children who represent him on earth. The image of God and the likeness of God mean that God made humans to represent him, to rule over the earth for him, and to relate to him as obedient children. We call this worship.

We see some other important things in Genesis 1. God made humans to have dominion over all the animals. Humans are not animals. They are far more valuable. Animals are not made in the image of God, but people are. That doesn't mean humans should be cruel to animals, but it does mean humans have a far greater status than animals.

We see that man and woman are created are created in God's image. That means they are equal in value and worth. That doesn't mean that man and woman are the same. We'll see that they have different roles. But both man and woman are made in God's image. Both share that honor.

We also see that man and woman are supposed to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. In order for Adam and Eve to be fruitful and fill the earth, they needed to have children. That means that before sin entered into the world, there was such a thing as sex and procreation. Some Christians in years past have got the wrong idea that sex is somehow always sinful. But that's not true. Marriage, sex, and children are good gifts given by God. But God intended for sex to be experienced only within marriage.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 192.

Before we skip ahead to Genesis 2, let's reflect on something. Do we realize that the very reason we were made is to have a relationship with God? Do you know that? This is good news. It means our lives have meaning and purpose. You exist to know God and to represent him and obey him and love him and worship him. Are you doing that? How well do you represent God?

Let's think about something else. The whole idea of human rights comes from the Judeo-Christian worldview, which says that all humans are made in the image of God. Even after sin entered into the world, we're still told that people are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). That means all humans should be treated with respect and dignity. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), an atheist, even recognized that the concept of "equal rights" come from Christianity.<sup>5</sup> The Declaration of Independence recognizes this when it says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Now, I think we've made an idol of "equality" and we have to be careful about what kind of liberty and happiness we're pursuing. But still, the very concept of human rights comes from Christianity. And when nations reject Christianity, we often see gross human rights violations. We saw this most clearly in the twentieth century when atheistic nations killed millions of people. Over a hundred million people were killed by the USSR, Communist China, and Nazi Germany in the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

Think about why the Bible's account of who humans are leads to human rights, and why other stories don't. If we are all special creations, made by God for a very special purpose, then harming and even killing another human being is an offense to God. Now think of the story that we often hear in schools and through the media: There is no creator God, and we have evolved through an unguided, unintelligent process. In other words, we're here by chance. There is no greater plan. If that was true, why should every human life be considered valuable? Why should the strong protect the weak? If we followed the theory of evolution to its logical conclusions, we

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<sup>5</sup> "Another Christian concept, no less crazy, has passed even more deeply into the tissue of modernity: the concept of the 'equality of souls before God.' This concept furnishes the prototype of all theories of equal rights: mankind was first taught to stammer the proposition of equality in a religious context, and only later was it made into morality: no wonder that man ended by taking it seriously, taking it practically!—that is to say, politically, democratically, socialistically, in the spirit of the pessimism of indignation." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 401.

<sup>6</sup> Nearly 62 million were killed in the USSR in 1917-1987. Thirty-five million were killed in China in 1949-1987, and 10 million were killed there in 1928-1949. About 21 million were killed by Nazi Germany in 1933-1945. Israel W. Charny, ed., *Encyclopedia of Genocide* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 25.

would support eugenics, the pseudoscience that says we can improve the human race through the control of human reproduction. If that were the case, we would only want the healthy and strong to reproduce, and wouldn't protect the weak and the handicapped. People who attempt to produce a better human race through better breeding, whether that person is Margaret Sanger or Adolf Hitler or people who abort children with Down Syndrome, are evil people who are rebelling against God and his creation.

Now let's look at Genesis 2. Last week I dealt with the first three verses, so I'll begin in verse 4:

<sup>4</sup> These are the generations  
of the heavens and the earth when they were created,  
in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

<sup>5</sup> When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, <sup>6</sup> and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—<sup>7</sup> then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. <sup>8</sup> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup> And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup> A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. <sup>11</sup> The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup> And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. <sup>13</sup> The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

There are a lot of details there that I won't be able to get into today. But I want to point out that God made the first man, Adam, in a special way. What's interesting is that Adam's name actually means "man."<sup>7</sup> He is the representative man. He was the first of the human race and, as the first man, he represented all of the human race. We also see that he is not just matter. He's dust, but he's not merely dust. God breathed life into him. That means he has a soul. That means that we are greater than the sum of our physical parts. That means we are more than the chemicals that we're made of. In some ways, we really are dust. Ninety-nine percent of our mass

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<sup>7</sup> The same Hebrew word, אָדָם, can mean "man" (as in person) or the proper name Adam.

consists of only six different elements: oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus.<sup>8</sup> God made a physical world, and he gave us physical bodies. These are good things that matter. (Pun intended.) But not all reality is physical. Important things like spirit, soul, and mind are immaterial. They can't be measured. We can't touch them. But they are real.

We also see here that after God made Adam, he placed him in a garden. The garden represents sacred space. It seems that there was room outside the garden that was not as sacred, that was not paradise. In fact, there are many clues in Genesis 2 and 3 that the garden of Eden was a temple. Here are the clues, given by Desmond Alexander:

1. The LORD God walks in Eden as he later does in the tabernacle (3:8; cf. Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15; 2 Sam. 7:6-7).
2. Eden and the later sanctuaries are entered from the east and guarded by cherubim (3:24; Ex. 25:18-22; 26:31; 1 Kgs. 6:23-29).
3. The tabernacle menorah (or lampstand) possibly symbolizes the tree of life (2:9; 3:22; cf. Ex. 25:31-35).
4. The pair of Hebrew verbs in God's command to the man "to work it (the Garden) and take care of it" (2:15) are only used in combination elsewhere in the Pentateuch [the first five books of the Bible] of the duties of the Levites in the sanctuary (cf. Num. 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6).
5. The river flowing from Eden (2:10) is reminiscent of Ezekiel 47:1-12 which envisages a river flowing from a future Jerusalem temple and bringing life to the Dead Sea.
6. Finally, gold and onyx which are mentioned in 2:11-12 are used extensively to decorate the later sanctuaries and priestly garments (Ex. 25:7, 11, 17, 31). Gold in particular is associated with the divine presence."<sup>9</sup>

So God put Adam and Eve in this sacred space, this temple. Soon we will see what he put them there for.

I'm sure the beauty of the garden was beyond what we can imagine. There were many trees in the garden. Some were "pleasant to the sight and good for food" (v. 9). There was also a "tree of life" and a "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The tree of life represents life, of course. As long as Adam and Eve had access to that tree, they would live. If they no longer had access to it, they would die. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is a bit more difficult to understand. I think it will be easier to understand the meaning if we read on in Genesis 2. Let's read verses 15-17:

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<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. "Composition of the Human Body," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Composition\\_of\\_the\\_human\\_body](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Composition_of_the_human_body), accessed October 3, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 131.

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

This is a very significant passage. First, let’s look at verse 15. God put Adam in the garden to “work it and keep it.” If you took this language all by itself, you would imagine Adam doing some gardening. But remember that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. He also wrote the book of Numbers. And in Numbers 3, we find those same two Hebrew verbs, the ones translated as “work” and “keep” in Genesis 2:15. In Numbers 3, the duties of the Levites are described. The Levites were the tribe of Israel that ministered at the tabernacle. All priests came from the tribe of Levi. The Levites were the ones who made sure that nothing unclean went into the tabernacle. They performed religious work and made sure that the tabernacle (and, later, the temple) wasn’t defiled. So Numbers 3:7-10 says,

<sup>7</sup> They shall *keep* [= “keep” in Gen. 2:15] guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they *minister* [= “work” in Gen. 2:15] at the tabernacle. <sup>8</sup> They shall *guard* [= “keep”] all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister [= “work”] at the tabernacle. <sup>9</sup> And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. <sup>10</sup> And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard [= “keep”] their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death.”

If Adam and Eve ministered in the garden in this way, they would have kept any impurities—anything sinful and unclean—out of the garden. And as they were fruitful and multiplied and filled the earth, and as they tended the garden, they would have increased the size of the garden until it filled the whole earth. That was their job. They were supposed to be priests of the King, royal priests. That’s what Israel was supposed to be (Exod. 19:5-6) and that’s what Christians are (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). We’re supposed to worship God and serve others by praying for them and teaching them about God.

The second thing we should notice is that God gives a commandment to Adam. Adam, as the representative man, was responsible to pass this command on to Eve and their children. He was allowed to eat from any tree in the garden except one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is apparently a covenant that God made with Adam. Hosea 6:7, speaking of the Israelites, says

But like Adam they transgressed the covenant;  
there they dealt faithlessly with me.

A covenant is a binding agreement that combines law and love. It's a relationship that requires obedience to the terms of the agreement. If Adam obeyed God's command, he would be allowed to live in the garden forever. If he disobeyed, he would be forced to leave the garden and die.

It seems that the tree of knowledge of good and evil represents wisdom. It represents a knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. Adam and Eve had a choice. They could trust God's word, and therefore know what is good and evil. Or they could eat the fruit of the tree, and find out that way. If they ate from this one tree, they would be expressing a desire to know everything themselves. They would express a desire to be autonomous. They would be expressing a lack of trust in God and his word. As God's image bearers, Adam and Eve were supposed to rule the world by obeying God's word.

This shows us something very important. Though we live in the world that God made, we need his word to help us interpret the world. We can figure out some things on our own through our studies, through reason, and through science. But science can't tell us what is good and what is evil. Science can't tell us why we're here and how we're supposed to live. Science can't tell us about much about God. We need God to tell us who he is, who we are, and why we're here. We need God's Word, the Bible, to tell us how to live. When we pay attention to God's Word, we show that we trust in God. When we don't listen to God's Word, we show that we don't trust him. When we reject God's Word, we're rejecting God himself.

Let's now look at the last part of chapter 2 of Genesis.

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." <sup>19</sup> Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man."



<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

In Genesis 1, God called things “good” because they functioned the way they should function. But here, God says something isn’t good: Adam is alone. He needs a helper, someone who will complement him. Adam had named all the animals, which was a sign of his authority over them. But they weren’t the helper that he needed. So God made a helper out of Adam. He created a woman for him.

The man needed a woman. She is equal to him as a person, but she is not the same as him. She complements him. Without her, there could be no procreation, no multiplying.

One thing that’s interesting in Genesis 1 and 2 are all the things that complement each other. We see heaven and earth, light and darkness, day and night, water and land, and man and woman. We need both, and obviously both are not the same. They fit one another.

This has a lot of implications. The first one we should notice is that the definition of marriage is found here. Verse 24 says a man shall leave his parents and become one with his wife. This is God’s pattern for marriage. This passage is quoted by Jesus (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7-8) when he discusses the meaning of marriage, and he says that the Creator said these words (Matt. 19:4-6). All the other arrangements of marriage in the Old Testament, such as polygamy, are against God’s pattern for marriage. It should go without saying that same-sex relationships are against God’s pattern for man and woman and marriage, too. All our attempts to change gender, or to redefine sexuality, are part of our rebellion against God.

I should also note that marriage is called a covenant in other parts of the Bible (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14-15). There is no hint here in Genesis 2 that marriage is temporary, or just a matter of convenience. There’s no hint that marriage is simply for those who are “in love” with each other. Instead, marriage is binding. Two people become one. This is a spiritual union, not just a sexual one.

Of course, this is not the end of the story. In Genesis 3, we learn how Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Sin entered the world, and that changed everything.

But as we consider this passage, I have to ask us: are we worshiping God and serving others? Do we trust that God’s Word is true and good? Do we believe what God’s Word says about our purpose in life? Do we believe what God’s Word says about good and evil? Do we believe what God’s Word says about men and women and marriage?

The reality is that all of us entered into a world that was broken and tainted by sin. We were born unclean. And that's a problem, because we were supposed to be priests who served God in his temple. But if you know anything about Leviticus and all the regulations for worship at the tabernacle and the temple, you know that priests had to be clean. Unclean priests would be removed from God's presence in the temple. And that's what we deserve. We deserve to be removed, just as Adam and Eve were removed. We don't deserve to be God's image bearers and his royal priests. We don't deserve to be God's children.

If you're not a Christian, you may think, "Why am I unclean? What did I do?" Well, the reason you exist is to know God, to worship him and love him and live for him. And you haven't been doing that. Imagine a mail carrier who wears the uniform of the USPS, drives around in a little white truck packed with mail, collects a paycheck and receives benefits from the US government, and never actually delivers mail. What kind of a mail carrier would you call that person? A bad one! That person should be fired! They haven't been doing their job. That's what we are like, but far worse. We were created to glorify God and we didn't do it.

But there's good news. Jesus is the very image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). He is the one who represents God the way that we should. In fact, he is God. He is the eternal Son of God who entered into his own creation to become a man. He has always obeyed God the Father perfectly, which is something we don't do. He never failed to glorify the Father. That's why he's the second Adam, the true Adam (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:42-49). The first Adam failed, but Jesus never fails. And not only did he live a perfect life, he died to take on the penalty that we deserve. We deserve to die because we, like Adam, have failed to obey God. But Jesus took that punishment on himself when he died on the cross almost two thousand years ago. Anyone who trusts in Jesus, who comes to their senses and follows him, is credited with Jesus' perfect status, and their sin has been paid for in full.

In 1 Corinthians 15:47-49, the apostle Paul writes,

<sup>47</sup> The first man [Adam] was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man [Jesus] is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

If you belong to Jesus, you are being remade into the kind of person God wants you to be. You are reflecting who God is, for his glory, and you will never be removed from God's temple.