

“The Image of God”

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Emerson Hall is the home of Harvard University’s philosophy department. Do you know what words adorn the top of Emerson Hall? “WHAT IS MAN THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM.”¹ These words come from Psalm 8. I wonder how many students and faculty gaze up at those words and ponder them. I wonder how many realize these words come from the Bible. Whether anyone cares that these words come from Scripture or not, the question, “What is man?” is an important one. What are human beings? Who are we?

Behind many of the most controversial issues of our day lies that question. Recently, we heard the news that white supremacists were marching, saying some rather disturbing things about other human beings. The issue of racism is alive and well, and at the root of this issue is whether or not all human beings are equal in some sense. The question of humanity is behind many other controversial issues, ranging from questions of bioethics to economics to politics.

Many people assume that all human beings have certain rights. We may not agree as to what constitutes a human right, but we all believe in the idea of human rights. What view of humans gives us a reason for why humans have rights? According to Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, “It is impossible to develop a secular account of human dignity adequate for grounding human rights.”² In other words, it’s impossible to say there is such a thing as human rights without bringing God into the discussion.³

Now, skeptics might think, “Oh, of course a Christian believes that!” But non-Christians do, too. Peter Singer, an atheist, said this a couple of years ago:

Why should all members of the species homo sapiens have a right to life, whereas other species do not? This idea is merely a remnant of our religious legacy. For

¹ This sentence, all in capital letters, appears without punctuation.

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 325.

³ Wolterstorff believes this is the case because secular accounts of human rights invariably are based on a human being’s capacities. For example, many believe that human beings should be treated with dignity because they have the capacity of rational reflection. However, not all human beings have such a capacity, such as those in vegetative states.

centuries, we have been told that man was created in the image of God, that God granted us dominion over the animals and that we have an immortal soul.⁴

Singer doesn't believe that all humans have a right to life. He believes animal lives are just as valuable as human lives, and in some cases, more so. He has advocated for a parent's "right" to decide whether to keep or kill an infant up to twenty-one days after birth.⁵

Peter Singer is a Darwinist. And if Darwin is right, species have evolved because individual members of species have competed with one another for resources. The more fit outlive and outbreed the weak. This would be true of human beings, too. So, there is no advantage for the strong and healthy human beings to protect the weak and sick. In Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, he describes natives of Tierra del Fuego as "savages." And he writes this:

At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world.⁶

Darwin didn't advocate that one group of human beings actively exterminate another, but he certainly doesn't seem to think that the natives of distant lands are equal to other human beings. And Darwinists, if they are committed to their own views of humanity, have a hard time indicating why we should treat each other well, other than to claim that this, too, is a product of evolution and helps us to survive.

However, Christianity has something very important to say about human beings. Christianity says that we are made in the image of God. That's what I want to talk about today. I'm going to make four points. The first is that we are made to image God. The second is that we don't do that well. The third is that our only hope is in the true image of God. And the fourth is that in Jesus we can start to fulfill our purpose.

First, we are made to image God. Let's look at the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1. Specifically, we'll read verses 26–28:

⁴ Michael Cook, "Peter Singer 'Disinvited' from German Philosophy Festival," *BioEdge*, June 20, 2015, <http://www.bioedge.org/bioethics/peter-singer-disinvited-from-german-philosophy-festival/11491> (accessed July 16, 2016).

⁵ Mary Poplin, *Is Reality Secular? Testing the Assumptions of Four Worldviews* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 94. See also Mark Oppenheimer, "Who Lives? Who Dies? The Utility of Peter Singer," *Christian Century*, July 3–10, 2002: 24–29, available at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2659>.

⁶ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2300/pg2300-images.html>, accessed August 7, 2015. It's worth noting that the full title of Darwin's earlier book is *The Origin of Species, by means of Natural Selection; or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

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.”⁷

Theologians have often debated what the image of God means. Many try to define that phrase in terms of the attributes that we share with God, the so-called communicable attributes. They think the fact that we are made in the image of God means that we share with God certain traits, like intelligence, a will, the capacity to love, and so forth. Now, it’s true that we do share those things in common with God. But if we’re going to understand the meaning of the early chapters of Genesis, we have to understand them in their cultural context and in the context of the Bible. The Bible indicates that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. Moses was a man who lived in the ancient Near East. So, if we’re to understand his writings, we should know something about religion in that time and place. We should also compare the early chapters of Genesis with the rest of Moses’s writings.

In the ancient Near East, there were all kinds of false gods. And for each god, there was a temple. And in that temple, there was an image representing that god’s presence.⁸ Furthermore, the Egyptian king was known as “a living statue” of a god. He was regarded as the image of that god because he was thought to be the son of that god. He acted in place of that god.⁹

In the Bible, there are a lot of clues that God made the world, and specifically the garden of Eden, to be a temple, a place where he meets with his people and they worship him, a theater for his glory.¹⁰ But, unlike the false gods, the God of the Bible doesn’t make statues of himself.

⁷ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

⁸ “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, 2012), 190.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁰ See the sermon that I preached on September 27, 2015, “A Theater for His Glory,” <https://wbcommunity.org/story-of-the-bible>. Thomas R. Schreiner (*The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013], 8) provides a nice summary of the evidence:

In fact, the Second of the Ten Commandments forbids people to make an image of God. Why? Because people are made in God's image. God's presence and his rule over the earth are supposed to be mediated by human beings. They are meant to represent him, to reflect his glory.

We also see that human beings are made in the likeness of God. This is the language that the Bible uses of a person's children. For example, Genesis 5 says, "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. . . . When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" (Gen. 5:1, 3). Seth was made in Adam's likeness, just as Adam was made in God's likeness. That means that human beings were made to be God's children, to love and obey him.

In Genesis 1, we see that God gave people authority and responsibilities. They were made to have dominion over the rest of the creation. They were made to be fruitful and multiply, to create other people who would reflect God's glory in his world. They were also made to subdue the earth. When we consider that only part of the earth was a garden, and that Adam was placed in that garden to work it and keep it, it seems that what God meant was for Adam and all other human beings to subdue the surrounding desert or wilderness and to make it a garden, continually expanding the garden's borders until the whole earth was full of the glory and knowledge of God.¹¹

Many theologians believe that Adam and Eve were created to be priest-kings. We have already seen that they were made to rule over the world. This is what Genesis 2:15 says: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." That may seem strange. How does gardening relate to ruling over the world? Well, apparently kings in Mesopotamia "created and kept extravagant gardens. In fact, 'gardener' was a descriptive title . . . for monarchs in Mesopotamia. . . . The role of Adam as gardener further portrays him as a *royal*

"Desmond Alexander notes a number of parallels between the tabernacle/temple and the garden: (1) the Lord walks in both (Gen. 3:8; Lev. 26:12); (2) both Eden and the tabernacle are guarded by cherubim, and they are accessed from the east; (3) the lampstand may symbolize the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22; Exod. 25:31–35); (4) the verbs used in Gen. 2:15 are also used of the work of the Levites in the sanctuary (Num. 3:7–8; 18:5–6); (5) a river comes from Eden and also flows from Ezekiel's temple (Gen. 2:10; Ezek. 47:1–12); (6) stones found in Eden are also in the tabernacle (Gen. 2:11–12; Exod. 25:7, 11, 17, 31); (7) both are on a mountain, which is sacred land in the ancient Near East." The reference is to T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 21–23 and idem, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 21–23.

¹¹ In addition to Gentry and Wellum (*Kingdom through Covenant*, 211–213), other theologians have arrived at this conclusion, notably G. K. Beale, *The Temple and The Church's Mission*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

*figure.*¹² But when we interpret that verse in light of the rest of Moses’s writings, we see that the verbs translated as “work” and “keep” are used of the priests and Levites who ministered in the tabernacle (Num. 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6). Those verbs are translated as “minister” (or “do service”) and “guard” in those other passages. The priests and Levites helped the Israelites worship God properly, and they were meant to guard and protect the holiness of the tabernacle, where God met with his people. So, God put Adam in the garden of Eden to minister and to guard it. And he told Adam that he could eat from every tree in the garden except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16–17). That, too, may seem strange. But it seems the idea is that Adam was supposed to rely on God for the knowledge of good and evil. He was supposed to trust God’s word and his interpretation of his world. Adam was not to decide for himself what was right and what was wrong.¹³

God also gave Adam “a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:20), a woman, Eve. And this woman was his wife. In fact, Jesus later quotes Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” In Matthew 19, Jesus says that God created people “male and female” and he says that God himself spoke the words of Genesis 2:24 (see Matt. 19:4–5). This shows that Jesus believed the Bible to be God’s word, and he claimed that the joining of one man and one woman is the definition of marriage.

So, when we look at the first two chapters of the Bible, we get the sense that God created human beings to represent him, to reflect his glory in his creation, to rule over the world by obeying his word, to love him, to worship him, to make other image bearers, and to serve as priests in his temple. And people were to do this by following God’s commands and his design for human life. This is our purpose. As Psalm 8 says,

- 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
- 4 what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
- 5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- 6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,

¹² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 210, original emphasis.

¹³ “[T]he ‘knowledge of good and evil’ has to do with the exercise of absolute moral autonomy. That is to say, knowing good and evil means choosing or determining for oneself what is right and wrong independently of God.” *Ibid.*, 217.

- ⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas. (Ps. 8:3–8)

There are other implications from the fact that we are all made in the image and likeness of God and are given this position of privilege. We should love other people because they, too, are made in the image and likeness of God. We should also be good stewards of God's resources. Everything is God's and he has entrusted to us whatever we have, to be used for his glory.

This is good news. It means our lives have purpose and meaning. It means we are not mere animals. We are crowned with glory! But, there's bad news, too. And that is my second point. We do a poor job of reflecting God. We're still made in God's image and likeness, but that image is obscured and stained by our sin.

We can see this by looking at Adam and Eve's rebellion against God. But we can also just look at our world. I want to identify at least a few great evils that come from our failure to image God well and to conform to his design for humanity.

The first great evil is a failure to worship God. Many people don't consider this to be an evil, but if we are made to worship God, then a failure to do so is evil. The apostle Paul says that from the beginning, human beings have known God simply by being part of his creation. But, he says, "they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. . . . Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:21–23). In other words, we're made to worship God, but because we don't want there to be a God in authority over us, we tend to make other things in God's creation our object of worship. Of course, Paul is drawing on the language of Genesis 1. Today, we might not make an image of a "creeping thing" and worship it, but we do tend to make things in the world the center of our lives, whether it's a person, money, power, entertainment, or even ourselves. We tend to de-god God, replacing him with something inferior.

When we do that, Paul tells us, God gives people over to what they lust after, "because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). Adam and Eve believed the original lie, that God wasn't trustworthy and that they could become like God (Gen. 3:1–6). And God gave human beings a partial punishment for our sins. We don't live in that garden paradise anymore. Instead, we live in a world that's harsh and cruel, where we chase after other things than God, a world that is cursed

by the reality of death. It's a world, to go back to Romans 1, that is full of murder, hate, disobedience, and sexual immorality, among other things.

The second great evil I want to highlight is a disregard for other human beings. There are many forms of this type of evil. There's murder, of course. In Genesis 9, we're told that murder will be avenged because God made man in his image:

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

Murder is the killing of an innocent life. If we read the Bible carefully and think about science carefully, I would include abortion among the murders committed. I realize that's strong language, but I have shown in another sermon that that is the case.¹⁴

Another great evil that relates to our disregard of fellow image bearers is hate. I see all kinds of hate directed toward others, particularly those who have different beliefs, those who have done wrong things, and those who come from different countries or cultures. James says this about our tongue, which is a symbol of our speech:

⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so (James 3:9–10).

We cannot bless God and curse the ones he's made. “These things out not to be.”

One specific form of hate is racism, which is a great evil, for at least two reasons. One, according to the Bible, all people on earth can trace their roots to one man. When Paul spoke in Athens, he said that God “made from one many every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26). So, all people are made after the image and likeness of Adam, who was made in the image and likeness of God. To hate other people simply because they look different, or because they come from a different country, is a slap in the face of the Maker. The second reason is simply that God isn't concerned with the color of our skin. The country of our origin doesn't determine whether we're a child of God or not. “For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). Someone who truly

¹⁴ See the sermon I preached on August 9, 2015, “Defending Life,” <https://wbcommunity.org/miscellaneous-sermons>.

loves God must love his fellow man. There is no room for racism in a heart that loves God and loves others.

Here's another way to disregard the lives of God's image bearers: by exploiting them or treating them as a means to an end. When we view people according to what they can do for us, when we view people as conveniences, or entertainments, or tools, we are not viewing them the way that God does. We can do this by mistreating or exploiting poor people. Yet Proverbs 14:31 says, "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker." Proverbs 17:5 says, "Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker." I would also say that whoever commodifies people, viewing them only by their productivity, also insults his Maker. Whoever views people as pawns to be manipulated or tools to be used also insults his Maker. We may not think we view people in this way, but do we look at our waiters and waitresses as servants or as people made in the image of God? How do we view our doctors, or cashiers?

Speaking of exploitation, did you know that slavery is alive and well in the world? Did you know that there are roughly 20 to 30 million slaves in the world, including thousands in this country?¹⁵ Many of these slaves are in Africa and Asia, but they're everywhere.¹⁶ About 80 percent of human trafficking relates to sexual exploitation.¹⁷ In other words, there are a lot of sex slaves in the world. And many people who are prostitutes or who perform in pornographic videos are essentially slaves.¹⁸ We might wonder why the sex trafficking business is so large. And the answer is that there is a great demand. Therefore, supply will be procured, often by force. The lustful human heart treats other people as pleasure machines, as objects to be used and thrown away.

So, the disregard of human life, whether through murder, hate, racism, oppression, exploitation, and enslavement, is a great evil.

One other great evil is simply the failure to obey God's design for our lives. This is related to our failure to worship God. When we fail to honor God, we are likely going to fail to

¹⁵ "11 Facts about Human Trafficking," <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-human-trafficking>, accessed August 26, 2017.

¹⁶ Max Fisher, "This Map Shows Where the World's 30 Million Slaves Live. There are 60,000 in the U.S." *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/10/17/this-map-shows-where-the-worlds-30-million-slaves-live-there-are-60000-in-the-u-s/?utm_term=.c02e18a84b63, accessed August 26, 2017.

¹⁷ "11 Facts about Human Trafficking."

¹⁸ Julie Bindel, "Most 'Sex Workers' Are Modern-Day Slaves," *The Spectator*, August 19, 2017, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/08/most-sex-workers-are-modern-day-slaves>, accessed August 26, 2017.

observe his design for human life. Romans 1 says so much. And one great evil is ignoring what God says about marriage. The Bible is quite clear that God instituted marriage to be between one man and woman. Before sin entered the world, distorting the human heart and its desires, we have only one marriage, and that is the marriage of Adam and Eve. Jesus, who is no mere man, but also the Creator (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1), tells us that this is the normative pattern for marriage. Any sexual activity outside that one definition of marriage is sexual immorality, which Jesus definitely addresses (Matt. 5:27–32; 15:19–20).

I realize some people may wonder why sex, whether heterosexual or homosexual, outside of that one definition of marriage is evil, or why same-sex “marriage” is evil. Well, for one thing, sex and marriage are meant to be bound together. The Bible knows of no righteous or good sex outside of marriage. And the reason is that sex unites two people together in ways that move beyond the physical. God did not intend people to share their bodies with each other without sharing their whole lives in an exclusive, lifelong relationship—in a covenantal relationship. And that faithful exclusivity that marriage requires is meant to point us to the greater marriage between God and his people. The whole point of marriage is that it’s a picture of the gospel, a picture of the eternal marriage between God and his people, between Jesus and the church (Eph. 5:31–32). This is a relationship between two different parties. It’s therefore a *hetero* marriage, a marriage between two people who are not the same. It’s not between God and God, or between people and people. That’s why marriage isn’t something to be trifled with. If the point of marriage were just to make us happy, then it wouldn’t matter so much what the definition of marriage is. But if the real meaning of marriage is to point us to God, then we dare not mess with God’s creation and definition of the institution of marriage.

Now, at this point, you may think, “Oh, I’m so glad I’m not doing all those evil things.” Really? Do you ignore God? Do you live much of your life as a functional atheist? Do you hate other people, or secretly lust or covet? Not one of us does all of life according to God’s terms.

What bothers me is how inconsistent humans are when it comes to calling out evil. Some people will talk about the evil of racism while ignoring the evil of atheism or the evil of abortion or of sexual immorality. Others will focus only on sexual immorality and abortion, and ignore racism and materialism and greed. We’re all inconsistent and we’re all hypocrites. People will excuse sexual sin by saying that people were “born this way.” Funny how those same people

never say that about racists. They don't say, "Well, yeah, he's a racist, but he can't help those feelings because he was born that way."

Perhaps another evil is our selective outrage, our eagerness to point the finger at others, instead of owning up to all the ways we fail to do what is right.

Clearly, we all make a mess of God's world. We don't live according to our purpose. Where then is hope?

My third point is that our only hope is in the true image of God, Jesus Christ. Because we fail at being what God intended human beings to be, because we fail to image God rightly, because we fail to live as God's children, God sent the ultimate human being, the true image of God, and the Son of God. The apostle Paul says that Jesus is the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45). Death came through the first Adam, but eternal life comes through Jesus to those who are united to him (Rom. 5:12–21). Paul says that Jesus "is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the image of the invisible God" (Co. 1:15). The author of Hebrews says that Jesus "is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb. 1:3). These writers say this because Jesus perfectly reflects who the Father is. He perfectly represents the Father on earth. He perfectly imaged the Father, reflecting God's glory back to himself and to the world. He perfectly obeyed the Father. He perfectly listened to God's word and did what it said, often quoting Scripture. He loves the Father, and while on earth he relied on the Father and prayed to the Father.

Jesus not only perfectly loved, worshiped, and obeyed the Father. He also perfectly loved other people. He treated people with respect. He didn't treat them as nameless, faceless numbers. He didn't treat people as projects or tools. He welcomed sinners. He stooped to their level. No, he stooped to *our* level! As the perfect image bearer, Jesus was fruitful and multiply—he made disciples. He subdued evil, thwarting the devil's plans and healing people of the effects of sin in the world. And as his disciples make more disciples, the earth is filled with the glory and the knowledge of God.¹⁹

So, Jesus is the perfect reflection of God, the perfect priest-king (and prophet, too), and the perfect human being. The Bible shows that only God could do this. Jesus, the Son of God, is the God-man, truly God and truly man. And not only did Jesus live the perfect life, but he died to pay for our sins. If he didn't do that, there would be no hope for us. For, as we've seen, we'll all

¹⁹ Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; Isa. 11:9; and Hab. 2:14 show that this has been God's goal all along.

failed to live according to God's purposes for us and because God is a perfect judge, he must punish that failure.

Jesus lived the perfect life, he died for the sins of those who trust in him, and he rose from the grave, to show that death cannot stop him and that one day the world and all of Jesus' followers will be resurrected. Jesus also gives his people the Holy Spirit, who lives inside of us and makes us more like Jesus. The good news is that whoever trusts Jesus is being conformed to him, the true image of God (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18).

My fourth point is that when we're united to the true image of God, we can then become fully human and start to live out God's purposes for us. We can serve as royal priests, who mediate God's blessings to others (1 Pet. 2:19). We can worship God rightly, knowing that our great High Priest, Jesus, leads us in that worship. We can relate rightly to God, and we can relate rightly to other people, even if they're not Christians, because they still have great worth, for they are made in the image of God, even if sin obscures and distorts that image.

This means that we should treat God as God and give him the reverence and worship he is due. If we act as if God doesn't exist, or if he only exists when we need a favor, we don't know him as he truly is. He created us. He sustains our every breath and every heartbeat. We exist for him; he doesn't exist for us. We exist to reflect his glory, to represent him, to love and obey him. We can do that if we're united to Jesus. If you know Jesus, live like it. Mediate God's blessings to others. Share the gospel with them. Treat them with love, kindness, and respect, regardless of whether they're bound for heaven or hell. C. S. Lewis once said,

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. . . . There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.²⁰

²⁰ C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 45–46.

Now, Lewis may be wrong to call people possible “gods,” but his point is that everyone is a soul who will live forever, who is either going to be united to God and become glorious or become isolated from God forever in condemnation, becoming something hideous. Do we really treat people like that? Do we understand that we are made by God and that we will either live forever in glory or die forever in shame and isolation and condemnation? Do we treat other people as special, made by God for a purpose?

So many of us gripe about the evils we see around us. It’s distressing to see evil, it’s true. But that evil won’t be stopped, at least entirely, through better laws or the right person in the White House. Evil won’t be stopped through our complaining or our social media posts. Our culture is dying because it’s not grafted into Christ. There is no long-term flourishing society without gospel witness and, at the very least, ethics borrowed from Christianity. We don’t want to put a band aid on a corpse. We want to bring the corpse back to life. And the only way is through Jesus. Only then will people truly live as they ought.

We can’t expect non-Christians to act as image bearers. They do a poor job because they don’t know the image of God. Let’s not complain that unbelievers act like they’re spiritually dead. Let’s share the gospel. Let’s be faithful to God in all areas of life, let’s love other people, and let’s tell the truth.

Imagine if we live like the image bearers we’re supposed to be! Imagine if we refuse to hate, but instead love. Imagine if we obey God and speak prophetically. Imagine if we pray for the lost souls around us and tell them the truth. Imagine if we put an end to our own racist thoughts or hateful thoughts. Imagine if we don’t treat people as a means to an end, but as people made by God. Imagine if we are faithful in our marriages, if we’re faithful members of our church, if we’re faithful witnesses. Imagine a world in which more people are conformed to the true image of God, and therefore live out their purpose in life.

If that happened, the world would look more like a garden than a wilderness. It would be more like a paradise and less like a pit of hell.