

Session 1

THE FOUNDATIONAL IMAGE

Genesis 1:26-27

Memory Verse

*So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God;
he created them male and female.*

– GENESIS 1:27, CSB



The Foundational Image

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Recognizing that humanity is made in God's image is foundational for understanding the importance of every human being.

American culture is consumed with image. Fueled by an unrelenting concern to maintain an appropriate image, many Americans obsess to an about physical appearance, perception of life, influence over others, and the personal brand that is communicated through a variety of social media platforms. Television channel programming is increasingly filled with half-hour infomercials about the latest and greatest workout regimen. Both self-esteem and body image issues are at an all-time high.

In addition to the physical aspect of one's personal image, there exists a perpetual desire to find significance and worth through the approval and validation of others. This includes the tension of wanting to fit in, but needing to stand out. Consider the various avenues of social media that allow us to do this. Regardless of the platform, the explosive growth of these various services hinges on the attempt in some small, or not so small, way to elevate one's image to celebrity status. This compulsion to elevate personal status is nested in trying to derive value from the wrong sources.

The opening chapter of Genesis speaks of humanity being made in God's image. The ramifications of understanding such a distinction include, in part, the blessing of a person knowing who he or she is. Being made in the image of God clarifies value, gives purpose, and orients a person according to God's demonstrated love for him or her. For those reasons, understanding what it means to be made in the image of God is foundational for understanding the world.

❓ What are some ways you recognize others attempting to establish or create value for their own lives? What impact do those efforts have on those who know them and/or care about them?

❓ What does seeking approval from others indicate about where one's value lies? Do you see that as dangerous or healthy?

❓ Describe some items in our culture that are defined by who made them. How does the identity of the maker impact the value of those items?

Session Summary


In this week's session, the writer of Genesis detailed the events of creation. Specifically, the text shows the intentional Trinitarian conversation that decided the specifics of man's creation. No other part of creation was made in God's image, only humanity. For that reason, being made in God's image set humanity apart as the zenith of His creation.


1. Eavesdropping on a Divine Conversation (Gen. 1:26a)

The verses immediately preceding today's focal passage detail the events of creation. Those details include the Holy Spirit's involvement in creation (v. 2), the power of God's spoken word to create from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), the orderly and progressive way in which God moved from chaotic void to even the smallest crawling creature on the earth, and the creation of the spiritual realm as well as the physical. A tremendous amount happens in these first twenty-five verses of the Bible.

Beginning verse 26 with “then” linked it to the events of the previous verse. Immediately prior to this verse was God’s repeated pronouncement that all that had been created was good. Everything was splendid, beautiful, and perfect. With every passing day, its majesty grew. This is important to understand because it meant that whatever came last in the order was the climactic, suitable crown of creation. The poetic structure of the writing of Genesis builds increasing tension toward the creation of humanity as the peak of God’s creation.

As if such a lead-in were not powerful enough, verse 26 begins with a conversation among the three persons of the Trinity. Notice the plural pronouns in the verse. God said, “Let us . . . our image . . . our likeness.” The question that demands to be answered is who God was talking to. The answer resides within the dialogue. The only one in whose image man was created was God; no angels were involved. Therefore, this conversation could not involve heavenly created beings. The rest of Scripture makes clear that the creation event was a Trinitarian event. All of this points to the fact that at the height of creation, a Trinitarian decision was made to complete the perfect creation by adding to it human beings. There is no other recorded divine deliberation for any other aspect of creation.

 How does realizing that the decision to make man in God’s image was a communal decision within the Trinity shape your understanding of who God is?

 Application: What does man’s creation at the height of God’s creation mean for your view of the value of all human life? What challenges does that realization present to you in the way you treat others?


Human beings are completely unique from the rest of creation in that they were created in the image of God. Being in the image of God is a theologically rich distinction. First, this meant that man was created to perform a function that was similar to God—namely, that humanity would tend and shepherd what God had


spoken into being. Second, it meant that humanity was created to commune with God in a way no other aspect of creation could. Third, there was an element of sonship connoted in being created in the image of God. While not being divine in nature, humanity was created to participate in a familial, father/child relationship with the Almighty.

2. A Holy Job Description (Gen. 1:26b)

The list of duties that came after the decision to create man in God's image only serves to underscore the implications of being made in the image of God. Man was created with a job description already in hand—he had a job. Work is holy because it is an imitation of the work that God did in speaking all that is into existence during creation. All of this existed pre-fall.

The job description for humanity is described in 1:26b as exercising dominion, and it is expanded in verse 28. After the creation of humanity, God blessed them and gave them the command to “be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.” This command was foundational to the covenantal structure between God and His people for the rest of the Bible. It is essentially a two-part job description: (1) God was going to use them to make a people for Himself that would (2) dwell with Him in a land that He would provide. A survey of the major epochs in the Bible would reveal the consistency of God's design, even after the effects of the fall. The root of God's dealings with His people was established in the divine command in Genesis 1 to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.

 How would you describe the significance of working as an aspect of being made in the image of God? Explain.

 Application: How do you view your own work as it pertains to bringing God glory? How does the mandate in Genesis 1 find a way into your relationship with God and the way you serve Him?

Once the Bible student turns the page, so to speak, to the New Testament, he or she realizes that this holy job description is still very much a reality. If part of what it means to be made in the image of God means that humanity has a holy work to do, then it would be no surprise that Jesus described Himself as a servant who did not come to be served, but to serve. However, the people of God that were being built under the new covenant were not established through the physical bloodline of Abraham, but through the faith bloodline of Abraham (who believed God, which was attributed to him as righteousness). The work of the Christian, then, as described in Ephesians 2:10 and other places, was to continue the work of Christ as His craftsmanship for whom good works were created in advance. The summation of that work, per Revelation 21, will be that God's people from every tribe and tongue will dwell with Him in New Jerusalem, the land which He will prepare for them. Part of what it means to be created in the image of God is that humanity participates in the work of God in a manner congruent with the character of God.

3. Male and Female He Created Them (Gen. 1:27)

Verse 27 chronicles the completion of the divine directive. Interestingly and helpful to a theology of the Trinity, where God was referred to in the plural in verse 26, He was referred to in the singular in verse 27. Whereas verse 26 focused on the community and intimacy within the Trinity, verse 27 focused on the unity of the direction and will of God.

The latter portion of verse 27 points to the gender distinctions inherent in the creation of humanity. In speaking of creating "him" earlier in the verse, the writer referred to the collective of humanity as a singular person. However, when more thoroughly explaining the nature of how man was created (illuminated more in the Genesis 2 explanation of creation), the writer specified that in order for man to be created in God's image, there must be both male and female human beings. So what is one to make of this?

First, part of what it means to be created in the image of God is functional. Specifically, according to the job description that God gave to Adam and Eve, they were to be fruitful, multiply, shepherd, and tend to creation. In order to be fruitful and multiply, there must be a man and a woman. Remember, this was in the perfected creation prior to the fall. This was by God's design. Mathews explains that "male and female human members are image-bearers who both are responsible for governing the world. Although the man and woman complete each other, making the full complement of 'man,' it can be said that an individual alone bears the 'image.'"²

Second, there was also a relational component to being made in the image of God. Remember verse 26 where the reader is allowed to peek behind the eternal curtain, so to speak, and eavesdrop on a conversation between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. The reader is allowed to witness the seamless unity and intimacy that exists within the Godhead. Part of being made in the image of God, then, is that the relationship between a husband and wife is the closest humanity would come to understanding the intimacy that exists within the Trinity. Again, this was all within the perfection of pre-fall creation. It was one of the ways in which God chose to bless humanity in His holy design.

? How was the creation of man and woman both functional and relational? What are the implications for the relationship between husband and wife?

? Application: If you are married, how have you experienced the reality of the way marriage both glorifies God and also brings joy to the husband and wife? If you are not married, how have you seen this in the marriages of others?

Verse 27, perhaps because it deals with the design of the man and woman being made in God's image, might seem like a surprising place to dwell on human sexuality. Rest assured, however, it would have been obvious to the original audience. No aspect of human experience was overlooked when God made man in His image, including the most intimate of relationships. As in so many other areas of God's creation, the covenantal relationship between a man and woman was equal parts functional, in pursuing God's promises, as it was a blessing from God, for the mutual joy of each person.

Conclusion

These two verses carry a degree of familiarity that can frequently rob readers of the profundity of their meaning. Mentally coasting through the creation narratives can cost the reader the richness of what it means to be created in the image of God. Holding these verses in contrast to the various avenues of seeking worth today yields several important points of consideration.

First, because nothing else in creation was created in God's image, humanity holds a unique position at the pinnacle of God's creation. This truth is absolutely astonishing considering the majesty that resides in the various corners of creation. Most could imagine being hushed with awe while gazing on the majesty of sunlit mountains, pondering the depths of the oceans, or attempting to consider the vastness of the cosmos. Even in the face of all those things, humanity is the pinnacle. That means that every single human being is an image bearer whom God loves. Christians, then, must continually grow in their view of other people to reflect God's own view.

Second, being created in the image of God means being about the business of God. Discipleship and service for the Christian have to do with continuing the work of Christ in the world, utilizing the spiritual gifts and abilities that God has given. God modeled work as a holy endeavor through creation. Jesus modeled work as a holy endeavor through His death, burial, and resurrection (among other things). So, too, must Christians pursue the holy job description of being ambassadors for Christ in obedience to His Great Commission.

Third, being made in the image of God means that humanity was created for community. Some of those relationships include even the most vulnerable and intimate relationships a man and woman can have. Those relationships, however, are not aimless or purposeless. They all work to fulfill what it means to be an image bearer. There is nothing in human experience that can compare to the community that exists seamlessly and eternally in the Trinity. However, God has created humanity with the capacity for deep relationships. Whether or not those relationships are God-honoring according to His design depends on the faithfulness of believers in the manner they engage one another.

❓ Which relationships in your life have given you the greatest sense of God's holiness when you are with those people? How can you best discern if the relationships you engage in are God-honoring?

❓ What spiritual disciplines help you remember God's love most effectively? Why is remembering God's love for people a key to understanding what it means to be made in His image?

❓ How does working, according to your holy job description, reconcile with the biblical teaching for Sabbath? What areas of serving others invigorate you the most? What percentage of your time do you get to engage in that sort of work?

CHRIST CONNECTION: Christ, who was a part of the divine conversation to make man in His image, became a man Himself to redeem God's image bearers.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Understanding that every human being is created in the image of God frames the worldview through which Christ followers seek to share the hope of Christ with those whom He came to save.



FOR NEXT WEEK

An Unduplicated Image

Main Passages

- Exodus 20:4-6

Session Outline

1. Accept No Substitutes (Ex. 20:4-5a)
2. God is a Jealous God? (Ex. 20:5b)
3. God's Desire Is for Covenant Love (Ex. 20:6)

Memorize

So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

- Genesis 1:27, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Genesis 1:26-27
- Tuesday - Psalm 139:13-16
- Wednesday - Genesis 9:5-6
- Thursday - Exodus 4:10-11
- Friday - James 3:9
- Saturday - 1 John 3:1-2

References

- ¹Mathews, Kenneth A. Genesis 1-11:26. NAC. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996.