

The Creation of the Image-Bearers

²⁶ Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, 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 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26–28)

What is a human? That might sound like a strange question, but how you answer it is going to affect myriads of practical things. People answer that question very differently. A Darwinian evolutionist says that man is an evolved primate who has achieved sophisticated forms of social life and use of tools. Transhumanists say that a human is a mind carried about by a body, and the sooner we can upload our minds to some kind of device, the better. That way, we can dispense with ageing, finite bodies. Environmentalists say that humans are like parasites on Mother Earth, using up her resources, damaging her irreparably.

What you decide about what a human is, is second only in importance to what you decide about who God is. It's the second great question. What you decide about humanity determines what you think our purpose in life is. It determines what you think the good life is, what is the ultimate and best use of human life. It determines your morality and your ethics: what is right and wrong to do to other humans and even to yourself. Your view of man will affect what technologies you think we should develop, how we should organise society, how our political systems and systems of justice should function. It will profoundly affect your view of marriage, of family, of sexuality. Debates about abortion, debates about homosexuality and LGBTQ orientations, debates about capitalism and communism, about racism and social justice, are all symptoms of a deeper condition, they are branches growing out of a more fundamental trunk, they are in the end debates about the question: what is a human being? What are we? Where do we come from? Why are we here? What are we for?

You can attempt to answer that question through biology, through sociology, through cultural studies, through psychology, through history, and they will all bring you illuminating insights. But if you wish to understand what a human is, you must go back to the very beginning. You must start with the very design of mankind, with his initial creation, with how he came to be. For that, we turn to Genesis 1. Genesis, the book of beginnings, is the best place to turn to understand who we are, and what we are for.

After creating the heavens and the earth with its light on day 1, separating the waters above from waters below on day 2 and then separating the seas from dry land and filling it with vegetation on day 3, God then proceeded to create rulers and dwellers for these realms. On day 4, God created the sun to rule the heavens by day and the moon to rule it by night, and the stars also. On day 5, he created bird life to live in and rule the firmament, and fish and aquatic life to live in and rule the seas. On day 6, He created land animals, both domestic and wild to rule the dry land.

But when all of these realms and rulers had been made, God desired one more. He desired a ruler of the rulers. He desired to create one who would be a king on His behalf, a sub-king, a sub-creator, ruling over every realm of creation, to whom all the other rulers would submit. The creation of man on day 6 represents the pinnacle of creation; indeed, in some ways, it represents the very point of creation. God did not create man last as an afterthought. He first created a home for man, and then as the absolute climax of His creative work, God created mankind. Of all the wonders of creation, all the beauties and complexities, none is greater or more marvellous than the creation of mankind.

¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well. (Psalm 139:14)

In fact, so momentous is the creation of man that Genesis chapter 2 is a retelling of day 6. The entire chapter elaborates and expands on what Genesis 1 says in one verse. Chapter 2 gives us the way God made mankind, and where, and in what order, and so forth. But it is in Genesis 1:26-28 that we have God Himself speaking and describing what man is and will be. So, here, in these three verses are a succinct summary of mankind: the plan for man, the purpose of man, and the perfecting of man.

I. The Plan for Man

²⁶ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;

Notice the shift, from God speaking impersonally “Let there be Light” “Let the...” to now God taking counsel with Himself. It is a clear break in the chronology. God is doing something significantly different, and now speaks not to the creation, but to Himself.

The first thing we notice here are the plural pronouns: let *Us* make man in *Our* image. How is it that God can be the speaker, and yet the self-reference is plural?

Well, some have tried to explain this as God speaking to the angels. But nowhere else are the angels seen to be co-creators, or in any way involved in the act of creation.

Others have said it is the divine council of exalted angelic beings. Psalm 82 seems to speak of this council of small-g gods – Elohim – which is the same word for God. But again, this seems like a shot in the dark. Nowhere else does God confer with others in the creation process.

Others have said it is what is called a plural of majesty, or the royal plural. Many languages have had the habit of a singular ruler using a plural pronoun to refer to himself. You may know the anecdote of when a tasteless joke was told to Queen Victoria, she famously replied “*We* are not amused”. The idea is to magnify and extend the majesty and honour of the king.

The plural of majesty is possible, but that is not all that is happening here. It opens the door for the doctrine of the Trinity. A verse like this does not prove the Trinity, but it clearly makes way for it, and shows from the first page that God is preparing us to know Him in the plural. Plural majesty is the doorway into plural persons in the Godhead. We'll see this plurality again in chapter 3, and at the Tower of Babel in chapter 11, and again in Isaiah 6.

The Triune God purposes to create one more thing. That thing is man, mankind, humans. The word here is *adam*. *Ha-adam* – *the man, or mankind*. Only in chapter 2:20, does the Hebrew drop the definite article, and then we translate this as a proper name, Adam. Until then, it means *the man*. It seems to come from a word meaning red or reddish, probably connected to the reddish-brown earth from which Adam was taken.

But the important thing is how God qualifies what pattern He will use in making man. “in Our image, according to Our likeness”. This is the plan for what this final creation will be.

This word for *image* is often translated as a statue in the Hebrew Scriptures. A statue or sculpture usually tries to replicate a living original, so in the same way, man is going to be a physical embodied replica of God. Now just as a statue is made of marble and doesn't mean the human it

depicts is made of marble, so being made in God's image doesn't mean that God Himself is some eternal flesh and blood. The idea is resemblance, or even what C. S. Lewis called transposition. In music, when you take a piece that was written for an orchestra, and you re-write it to be played on one piano, you transpose it. So in the same way, God is taking things of Himself, eternal, immutable, ultimate and transposing them into this new medium, a flesh and blood one.

The word *likeness* just extends the idea, it means similarity, either in appearance, or nature, or character, or something else. This is the plan for mankind.

So God purposes to make mankind as a kind of mini-replica of Himself, of all the creatures one that now shares, and reflects and communicates something of the transcendent God. So what does that mean, to be made in God's image?

Our context doesn't tell us much. What we do know from the context is that it distinguishes us from the animals.

Here the interpretations are legion. We can group the suggestions into three groups. The first group thinks it has to do with some quality that God has which is now shared by man. Some say this means man has conscience. Others say it must be reason and logic. Or perhaps it is language, the word, being able to know reality through words. Others suggest it must be man's immortal soul and spirit. Augustine suggested that man is a triad of memory, intellect and will, and this mirrors the Triune nature of God. Or some have said body, soul and spirit reflect this.

Is there any physical resemblance? We know God is Spirit, although when He appeared to man in the Old Testament, He nearly always assumed the form of a human. But what we can say is that the physical form of humanity was designed to illustrate truths about God. God tells us He speaks, sees, touches, feels, smells. God did these in ways we can't fully understand, but the human being's body illustrates this. And above all, God the Son was pleased to assume human form and unite Himself to it eternally, and He knew this when making man.

The second group thinks the image of God has to do not with qualities, but with relationships. Man, as we'll see, is made not to be alone, but to live in fellowship. So when God makes man, we read He makes mankind male and female, so that there is companionship, fellowship, community, relationality. Mankind can commune with God and with each other. Man is a communal creature, mirroring God who in the Trinity has always had communion. God's image in man is relational communion.

The third group think it has to do with function. Believing that the context is key, they note that right after saying man will be in God's image, man is commanded to subdue the earth, exercise dominion. Therefore, they see God's image as being like God to the world as a kind of sub-creator, man must rule, to order the world, to bring order out of chaos, to tame the world.

The fact is, Moses did not tell us what the phrase means, and nowhere in Scripture is it spelt out. Likely we are simply to understand that we are hybrids, partly heavenly and partly earthly. We are earthy, red, dust-creatures, but we are God-reflectors. This is why Satan's temptation in chapter 3 was so devious: Adam and Eve were already like God. This is also why God forbids making an image of Himself. Not only is it impossible to depict the invisible God visually, but the only visual image of God that He left us with is each other. It is in humanity we will find our most compelling understanding of what God is like, or what He is not like.

We straddle both worlds, sharing many things with the animals, but then sharing many things with God, including conscience, reason, language, creativity, aesthetic perception. We do have relational

communion, and it is true that we uniquely tame and subdue this world. We are neither pure animal, nor pure spirit. We have things from both, and so we represent and reflect God, in this world.

This is the plan: to create godlike creatures of the earth who will straddle both worlds. The human condition is a profoundly eternal and serious one. This helps us to understand what C. S. Lewis meant when he said, “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest 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 the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal... But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.”

That is the plan for man – the kind of creature he is to be. But now God states what this image-bearer will do in the world, his purpose as he relates to the world he will be put in.

II. The Purpose of Man

let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

Dominion is a Hebrew word that always means an authority relationship- masters over slaves, administrators over employees, king over subjects, shepherds over sheep. God places man as the head and ruler over this world. God hands over the work of His hands to mankind, and makes man the regent of the Earth. God then recites all the kinds of creatures that inhabit those realms. Mankind must rule over them. In fact, as we'll see in chapter 2, instead of God giving names to the creatures, as He did for Heaven, Earth, Sea, Land, He delegates that role to man. Man gets to name the animals and thereby exercise dominion over them.

Now this dominion gets even clearer when God has made man and then addresses them in verse 28: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26–28) “

Man is told again to exercise dominion over all the creatures, and this time the word *subdue* is added. This is a very strong word that means applying force, even violent force. God is telling humankind that even though the world is not cursed, it is wild, and it will require real effort and strength to bring it into subjection. After the Fall, this is going to be even more pronounced.

At this time, there is one place on Earth that is already tame. We find out in chapter 2 that God had sectioned off an area and made it a Garden, a cultivated, tamed spot of beauty. That is the Garden of Eden. Mankind is to use the cultivated, orderly, tamed environment of the Garden as a template for what to do with the rest of the world. Expand the Garden one meter at a time, one mile at a time. Tame the environment, tame the landscape, tame the animals. Make it all fruitful, useful, beautiful.

In many ways, God is delegating to mankind something He did in the creation week. He kept turning chaos into order, what was formless into something good and beautiful, and then He named it. So man gets to tame and shape and beautify and then name.

And here you can see one of the great purposes of man. We are those who make meaning. We take the raw materials of creation, and shape them, order them, tame them into something beautiful and meaningful. We tame sound waves and turn them into music. We tame words and turn them into poems and stories and speeches. We tame metals in jewellery, trees into beautiful furniture, electromagnetism into electricity. We are meaning-makers, and therefore culture-makers. We order our environment into something that reflects God's ultimate order of truth, goodness, and beauty. That is the plan turning into the purpose. Image-bearers now bring the glory of God to bear on their world, bringing beauty and order into every square inch of the planet, and maybe, ultimately, other planets.

Turning a planet into a Garden is going to take a lot more than two people. That is why the first part of the command in verse 28 is "Be fruitful and multiply".

Man is to procreate abundantly, because he will not be able to exercise dominion over the earth if there are very few humans. Ruling the earth is going to require a huge human population, that means families, and from families, societies and towns and cultures and nations. Only a large human population will be able to develop, invent, discover all the ways to tame the earth. It will need to extract from the Earth its minerals and stone and timber, and create tools, and technology, networks of trade and therefore economies, they'll need to literally move mountains and divert rivers and figure out the mysteries of maths and science and art and music and engineering and so on. Be fruitful and multiply.

Here is the doctrine of vocation. Vocation means calling, and every human has a calling. You are to do some version of Genesis 1:26 and 28 in the world. You are supposed to bring order and beauty to the world.

Now this blessing which God confers on man is the opposite of two very popular false ideas.

The first is the idea of overpopulation. Since the 50s, we have been warned that there are too many people in the world and that there won't be enough space for us all, not enough food, and not enough water. We need to have less children, or no children, or perhaps some even more drastic way to reduce the population.

Now it is not hard to see what this disobedience to this command has brought. To replace every couple that produce children, you need 2 children, a birthrate of 2.0. Today the top 15 countries by GDP have birthrates of under 2. Shrinking populations means more elderly people needing support from the fewer younger people. That means higher taxes for everyone, later retirement ages, and even bankrupt governments. Shrinking populations eventually collapse economies built for more people.

But not only is there enough space, food, and water for a growing population, but part of the dominion command is to keep figuring out how to support more people, and grow more food and get more water. One of the ways that Islam is taking over Europe is simply through birthrates well above 2, while the older, secular, European populations drop well below that and will drop into the minority in the next 20 years. If Christians want a stronger presence, and do not want liberal agendas forced down their throats, one of the simplest ways to do that is to have more children or adopt more children than the liberals, many of whom can't or won't have children. Be fruitful, raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and you may find that you are simply the majority in a few decades.

The second false teaching is the idea that nature is pristine, and man must leave it alone. We must not mine for natural gas, we must not cut down trees for farmland, we must not spray the food we

grow, we must not fish too much, we should really grow our meat in a laboratory. This all assumes that we have no right to touch the world; that we are just guests, and we should not change anything. But Genesis 1 assumes we are not guests, but leaders. Man was not made for the earth; the earth was made for man. We are supposed to tame it, control it, shape it, and subdue it, forcefully if necessary. Now, we should do so without greed, selfishness, waste or wanton cruelty. But we are supposed to shape it according to a godly pattern.

The plan was that we would be Godlike creatures in God's world, shaping it and taming it for His glory.