

Know Thyself: God's creation of man

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Genesis 1:26-31

I believe it was Socrates who said, "Know thyself." One of his greatest philosophical statements was simply two words long, "Know thyself."

He rightly understood that a proper understanding of yourself is of the utmost importance. He understood that a right anthropology—that is, a right doctrine of man, is significant because it will affect the direction of the whole of your life.

For the last several weeks we've been looking at the beginnings of life. No doubt you've seen how it has radically differed from your average textbook in America.

The wider culture would have you think that man is nothing more than a glorified germ. Your grandfather was an amoeba that sprang from the primordial soup. Essentially we all are huge freaks of nature; the accidental by-products of random cosmic occurrences.

Of course, when you keep telling people that, there will be consequences. People will start living like they are meaningless and insignificant creatures.

But when we look into the Scripture, we find something different. We see something radically different.

This morning we are going to be involved in developing a right anthropology, a right view of man. And we are going to talk about how God created man. And there are 4 things I want you to notice about yourself from this passage. The first thing I want you to notice is that you were created, in the image of God.

I. In his image

In verse 26 it says, "Let us create man in our image, after our likeness." Then, as if to highlight the significance of it, the words are repeated in verse 27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him."

I will admit that theologians have spilled a great deal of ink on this matter. There has been a great deal of discussion throughout the history of the church as to what this means. I want to say up front that there is one thing upon which virtually all of them agree. This demonstrates that you a creature of insurmountable value.

The imago dei expresses the inherent dignity of man.

We acknowledge that all creation has a certain amount of value. After all, whatever there is, has been created by God and created good. But here we find that man is designated as having

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the likeness of God himself. It tells us that man is of more worth. Man, in receiving this distinction, is marked out as having an inherent dignity and value to which nothing else in the creation can compare.

And it is this attribute of man that gives credence to the sixth commandment, "Thou shall not murder." Life is precious and ought to be preserved because we are made in his image. To put it another way, "To attack man, be it with words or weapons, is to attack God himself."

Think of a woman who gets mad at her boyfriend after he breaks up with her. She then goes through her house cutting him out of all the pictures that she has. What is she doing? As she violates his image, she is ultimately saying something about how she feels about him.

A similar thing can be said when it comes to God and us, as his image bearers. To assault man is to assault the God whose image man bears.

This is why we forbid doing needless harm to ourselves and to others. This is why we do not tolerate the unjust killing of men. This is why we oppose things like abortion and euthanasia. This is not the time to have a full discussion on such things. However, it ought to be noted that our culture would have us dispense with the unborn and the aged or ill without much of a thought. However, this ought not to be so. We do not give up on life simply because it is unwanted. Man is made in God's image. Since this is so, his life is sacred. And his dignity ought not to be compromised in the least degree.

This much we are all agreed upon. Though we might differ on our understanding of the nature of the image of God, we do not compromise on this application

But what does it mean to be created in the image of God?

The first thing we can say is that it does NOT mean we physically look like God. When a child is born, we can sometimes say, "He looks a lot like his dad." By that we mean that we can see something of the form of his dad, we can see something of his dad's image, in the physical make up of the child.

That is not what we mean. The Bible tells us that God is a Spirit and does not have a body like us.

However, we can sometimes say that a child is "just like his father." By that we mean that there are certain attributes and characteristics that they have in common. And this is how we are to understand what the Bible is saying here.

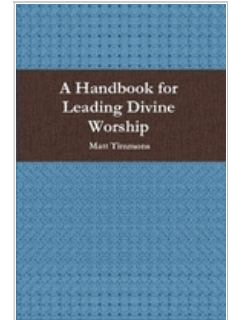
When we look at the New Testament it helps us a little. In the book of Colossians it says, "[you] have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." And a parallel passage is to be found in the book of Ephesians. It says, "Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness, and holiness."

So the New Testament tells us that the image of God consists in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. That is to say, we are rational, moral, and spiritual creatures—just like God. We have a mind to think (knowledge), we have a conscience whereby we make choices between good and evil (righteousness), and we have a spiritual orientation whereby we relate to God (holiness).

That is the "bare bones" of what it means to be created in the image of God. As I said before, much ink has been spilt over what this means. Much more could be said. But that is the



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mainstay of what is encapsulated in this doctrine.

It is important that we deal with what is intimately connected to the idea of being made in the image of God. If you look at the passage, you will see that connected to the idea of being made in the image of God is the fact that we were created male and female.

II. Male and female

Read with me verse 27. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

The thing that immediately stands out is that God has established a difference of gender. By his creative act he has distinguished men from women. As a result, we say that there are males and there are females. And because God has assigned each, there is no confusion between the two.

To many of you this may go without saying. However, this must be emphasized because there has been a virulent attack on the idea of gender in recent years. It is becoming more and more common in our society to think of one's sexuality and sexual orientation as not being pre-determined or limited to one's physical make-up. Instead of being knit into the fabric of the created order, many are relegating gender to the area of personal preference.

Some of you might have seen some of the news reports that have come out lately that reveal how far people are taking this. There have been a numerous reports of parents trying not to impose gender on their newborn child, despite the child's physical make up. For instance, [one story](#) talks about the birth announcement one set of parents sent out. It included all the normal things one might find in a birth announcement, such as the height, weight, and name of the child. However, the birth announcement did not include the child's gender. The parents are attempting to keep the child's gender under wraps so that they might not influence him/her one way or the other. Despite the clear indications of the child's physic, they want to allow the child the opportunity to choose his or her gender by himself (or herself, as the case may be).

This mentality is part and parcel with an evolutionary worldview. If everything is in flux and change is an essential aspect of the universe, then it follows that gender is not a fixed thing.

However, this kind of thing is incomprehensible from a Biblical standpoint. This Scripture here tells us that gender is not an accident. It is not "up for grabs." These differences in gender are etched in the rock of God's creative order. And therefore we are obligated to acknowledge and affirm them.

And it is necessary to do so because, as I mentioned earlier, of their intimate connection to the image of God.

We often talk about the battle of the sexes. When we talk male and female, we often pit them against each other. However, we should realize that the two sexes are not in opposition to one another. They are complimentary in the truest sense of the term because both are necessary for an accurate portrayal of God's character.

I like the way Wayne Grudem puts it in his Systematic Theology, "We see aspects of God's character reflected in each [the man and woman's] lives. If we lived in a society consisting of only Christian men or a society consisting of only Christian women, we would not gain as full a picture of the character of God as when we see both godly men and godly women in their complimentary differences together reflecting the beauty of God's character."

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So far from being grounded in own opinion or particular inclination, gender is grounded in the created order. And ultimately, the genders are grounded in God himself.

A Christian anthropology then begins with the fact that man is created in the image of God. Then it proceeds to affirm the validity of the genders. But, as you see here, these males and females were not supposed to stand alone. Our text tells us that these males and females were to procreate.

III. To multiply

You see in our passage that they were given the charge to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” (v.28) God’s plan—God’s will!—was that men and women are to have offspring. We are to create families. And these families are to produce clans. And these clans were to produce tribes. And these tribes were to continue to reproduce and increase in number.

And this is a teaching that we must really take to heart. For it is a teaching that is rarely spoken of, even in Christian circles. It is important that we understand that God’s design is that we should have children and build families.

Now, we recognize that there are some who, for some reason or other, cannot have children (or cannot be as fruitful as others). The providence of God can prevent people from bearing a child or multiple children.

But all too common in our day is that people do not want children. They may very well want a large home, but they do not want a large family. In other words, they are more infatuated personal pleasure and they are out to accumulate as much stuff as they can. Sure they want a big home, but their aim is to fill it with a bunch of stuff, not children.

You know, I love the fact that there are so many mini-vans and conversion vans in our parking lot. But not many people have that kind of mentality. Not a lot of people will say, “My dream car is a 15 passenger bus.” They are thinking Lexus. They want the Maserati.

It is interesting where we are today. Instead of seeking to increase the size of one’s family, the tendency today is typically towards limiting it. And we are replacing children with materialism. Think about it this way: In 1900 the average family had 6-7 children. Yet the average house was just under 1,000 square feet. Today, the average house is double that size, but the number of children is less than half of what it was in 1900.

There is certainly nothing wrong with having a big house. However, we need to realize that there has been a worldview shift in our country. And I want us to be aware of it. God’s original intent was that we should have children! God’s design was that we multiply and fill the earth.

And part of the reason for doing that is because God has also charged us with dominion.

IV. With dominion

You see this idea repeated in our text. It is first mentioned in verse 26. It says, “Let him 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.” That’s pretty all encompassing. There’s not one item in creation over which we do not have dominion.

The second mention of it is found in verse 28. And you will note that it is further explained. Look at what it says. “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."

You see, the word dominion is complimented now with the word "subdue."

Now, the word dominion means "to rule" or "to subjugate." And the word subdue has the idea of "to force." So, you get the idea you are to overpower the earth and tame it. You almost get the feeling that all the creation is still a little rough. It almost sounds a bit wild and need taming.

You moms should know what this means. You are the queen of the home. You rule over it. But sometimes your kids get a little rowdy. So you have to subjugate them and subdue them. You must force them to sit down and do their lessons. Sometimes your dominion of your house needs to be a little more proactive, so to speak.

That is the idea that is being communicated here. We are to subdue the earth. We are, in a sense, to do what God has been doing in his work of creation.

Remember again, God started with a heavens and earth that was formless and void. Then he started to demonstrate His dominion by forming it and fashioning it the way it was supposed to be. You might say that he subdued it by his word. He spoke and the waters were forced apart. The sea was subjugated in that it was given a boundary. It was pushed back and not permitted to come any further.

Now, in these verses, we see that God puts that same sort of responsibility in our hands.

This is what is often referred to as the "cultural mandate." By that we mean that God calls us to create culture. We are to take the resources that God has given us in his creation and build culture with them. So the sand on the beach is for us to subdue. Someone can subjugate it so that it becomes a microchip to power a super computer. Another person can take a tree and subdue it. He can apply force it and forge it into a chair. God wants that. He wants us to stop up rivers with dams and force it through channels so that it produces energy.^[1] This is the charge that God has given us.

It is because of this doctrine that western culture is what it is today. This is what has made it surge beyond all other cultures in technological advances and prosperity. The dominion mandate spoken of here is what causes economies to thrive and cultures to advance.

And this doctrine important to remember because it reminds us that we should not feel guilty for engaging in dominion oriented occupations. Unfortunately there is a tendency in evangelicalism to exalt missions and ministry above every other kind of work. We tend to think that preaching the gospel is more important than digging ditches or interior design. That is not the case though.

We do believe that the great commission is important. And it is very important that the ministry of the word have its place. But, as you see here (from the very first commission!), being behind a pulpit is no more holy and no more important than turning a wrench for a living. Each has his place in God's economy, and each has his role in fulfilling God's plan for the world.

Conclusion:

With all that is said here regarding man, you can most certainly tell that he is not an afterthought of creation. We can deduce nothing more than that God has created man to be the crown of creation.

Having looked at what we have, and seen the splendor with which we have been endowed, it ought to lead us now to worship our King with greater vigor.

[1] A hearty thanks to Greg Johnson and his [article on the cultural mandate](#):

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