

Made in God's Image

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[0 : 00] It's Genesis chapter one verses 26 to 31 and Sue is going to come and read for us. 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.

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

And God said, behold I've given you every plant, every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit, you shall have them for food and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I've given every green plant for food and it was so and God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good and there was evening and there was morning the sixth day.

We are in a series on Genesis chapter one and two and so far we've been focused on the reality that God is the Creator who made the world and that means we are creatures and God is absolutely necessary, we are relative beings.

And the theme in the midst of that so far has been focused on the fact that when God created the world and he made us, we can say, because of that we can say God is most hidden and yet most revealed.

[2 : 07] God is, as the theologians have said, transcendent, so big, so great, so powerful that he can create the world out of absolutely nothing and yet at the same time being that big, that transcendent is also close to us and present with us and near to us.

So hidden yet so revealed simultaneously and we talked last week about how much we forget that, we forget that because God made us and God sustains us and right now Colossians one says if God removed his powerful presence from us, the world would split apart.

We forget how very close God is to every single one of us right now. No matter what you believe in, no matter what you think about God, it is God who's sustaining you.

And so in him we live and move and have our being, he is not far from any of us. And so seek him. Maybe that's the call of Genesis one. Will you seek the Lord while he may be found?

He is very close to you. Now the same thing comes up again today as we think about this passage that Sue read for us about the image of God that we were made in God's image.

[3 : 16] We will never stop as human beings asking the question, what am I? What is a human? Even more importantly than what am I? What is my composition? What is a human is the question, who am I?

So we all of us know very well that we live in an age where everybody is talking about identity all the time and searching for identity and using phrases like finding themselves.

So we're hungry for an identity to be distinct from other people. And the question, who am I comes up right on the first page of the Bible.

Blaise Pascal, the great 18th century French mathematician, philosopher, he said, man is neither angel nor beast. And he's capturing there really the two ways that we tend to go with it when we make the mistake of misdefining what a human is.

Angel or beast, in other words a demigod. Lots of people in the modern world think of themselves as gods. They might not say that out loud, but that's how we behave. Self-made people in charge of our own destiny, in victus, captain of our soul, conqueror, living for the lavishness of all the possible

pleasures we could find.

[4 : 29] And on the other hand, many people say in the same breath, and of course we are beasts. Nothing but a bit more mutated than the apes right below us.

And the Bible comes in four little words, revolutionizes anthropology, what a human is, made in God's image.

And that phrase is at the backbone of so much of our society, even though our society doesn't know it, like rights language, made in God's image.

And if you get it, if you capture it, if you believe it, it'll change your life. It'll change what you think about yourself. It'll change what you think about God. And so let's ask today, what is the image of God?

What is it? Who are we? Three things that we learn here. First, the image of God teaches us we were made for relationships. Secondly, that we are creatures but unique.

[5 : 26] And thirdly, that we are, we are God's image. And then we'll conclude with the fact that we suppress that reality. So let's think about that together for just a little bit.

First, what does it mean to be made in God's image? The very first thing we see chronologically in the passage from verse 26 is that we're made for relationships.

And so if you look down with me at verse 26, I just want to focus on this little sentence for a second. Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness.

There are a few really important words there to think about. The first is, let us make man in our image. This word man is the word Adam in Hebrew.

You might say Adam as the scholars would say it. And here it's not referencing the man Adam, the man that we talk about in Genesis 2, though it is, but it's talking generically.

[6 : 26] So the word Adam just means human. So the very first thing we read is God says, let us make humanity in our image. It's male and female. We read that right after that. It's men and women made in the image of God.

That's what the word Adam there encompasses. It's generic. If you back up just a second, just a bit, but then it's, first it says, then God said, let us make humanity male and female in our image after our likeness.

Now the very first thing, the very first verb you get when God made us is God said, he spoke us into being.

And you back up, we looked at this very briefly in the first week, but back up all the way to verse three, God said, let there be light and there was light. He spoke creation into being.

Now one of the very first things you've got to say that we learn about God in Genesis 1 is that God is a speaker, a communicator. And it doesn't say that he thought the world into being or that he thought humanity into existence.

[7 : 32] People have made that mistake in the past by thinking about God as basically a big thinker, you know, up in the sky with his hand on his chin, like the philosopher. And no, instead we don't have that God thought us into being.

Of course he could have. He has a mind, but it says that he used language. He used speech to make us. And there's a big difference in thinking and merely thinking, but also speaking. Speech is public. Speech is something that's shared because he spoke. That means that we can continue to hear him. And one of the very first things I think we learn about us is that God made us as himself a relational speaker.

You know, if you speak, it means that you seek relationship. If you communicate with somebody, if you send your voice out into the world, it means that you're trying to communicate with another. And if you ask, what is God's image? One of the very first things you have to say is it's got to be at least part of it captured in language that we have the ability to speak.

[8 : 36] We can communicate. And that means that we're relational beings because God is relational. And that relationship comes right out in the very fact that he uses words to make us.

A public speech, a public testimony, his language. I don't want to focus on this, but it's not only that, but down in verse 31, it says that the words he used to make us when he had made everything, verse 31, he looked at what he had made and saw and said, it is very good.

Now in a time where we are constantly bickering with one another in the public sphere about opinions, right now in America, there are lots of opinions between Republicans and Democrats, for example, about who's who and who's going to be the best.

We have opinions. In the very beginning of human history, God spoke and then he interpreted what he made. He spoke the world into being and then he said, and it is good.

And that's so important because look, we all have opinions about so much politics, what's good for culture, what's bad, all sorts of things, right? But it's important to know that there is a God who not only speaks this world into existence, but interprets it absolutely as well.

[9 : 52] He speaks it and he says, this is what's good, this is what's not good. And that means that no matter what we think, no matter how much our opinions change, no matter how much politics changes, no matter how much the world changes all around us by the opinions that we all share and break against each other with, God has spoken and his opinion is not an opinion at all.

It's absolute. Whatever he says is what's right, true, good. We have got God at the beginning of human history as a speaker and that means he is relational and we are relational.

The very last bit of the sentence to see about that is it not only says that he spoke, but then it says, let us make man in our image.

So then God speaks in the plural pronoun, let us in our, let us make man in our image. There are lots of different ways potentially of interpreting the us language, but the most common, the most magisterial, the main interpretation throughout all of church history has been that when God does that, God the Father is speaking to God the Spirit and God the Son.

You know, God has already spoken, his Spirit has already come into the world and that means he's acknowledging in that moment there's an usness, a try personality about God.

[11 : 08] Relational, that God exists, one God in three relations and he makes us in his image to be relational. And so what's the first lesson? The first lesson is that when God makes us through his speech, we realize that we are beings in his image made for relationships.

We are made for relationships. We're made first for the deepest relationship we could possibly have with God and then with other people as well. And I just want to ask you today, you were made for a depth of relationship.

Do you have a relationship with God who made you? Do you have a relationship with other people in the light of God's creating you? You were made for that.

And one of the things you could reflect on for just a moment is, you know, think about how much relationship and communication with language shapes who you are.

We're asking the question, who are we? And you know, think about the words that have been spoken to you throughout your life. The relationships you have with a mom or a dad or a sibling or a friend or the relationships you don't have, the relationship you don't have right now that you've always wanted, how much it affects you, how much it changes you, how much you are shaped by relationship and speech.

[12 : 29] You might, some of you in the room today will remember that one sentence that somebody spoke to you, you know, that person who spoke that sentence to you that year so long ago that shaped you horribly or wonderfully.

That one line of relational communication. And the reason that there is such power in language and relationship is because that's exactly what God made you for.

To be like Him, a speaker in relationship. How are you using your words in your relationships?

Secondly, we're made for relationships. Secondly, who are we?

The second thing we see here is that we are creatures, but we're unique. And if you back up in the passage to verse 24, just before where we started reading, if you have a Bible, God spoke and He said, let the earth bring forth living creatures.

And then there's this chorus of, so the creeping things came according to their kinds, that's back a little bit. Before that, the fish came according to their kinds.

[13 : 44] And there's this refrain, according to their kinds, according to their kinds. And then it comes to us, and it said, but, or God said, let us make men in our image.

There's a difference there, but there's a similarity there at the same time. All right, we were made on day six, like the rest of the land animals.

And when you look a little more closely, there's a word that's used throughout God's creation during day six. It's the word ground, the ground. The animals came from the ground.

If you were to flip over to chapter two, verse seven, we're told that God made humanity from the ground, Adam from the ground. And it's the same idea. And the word in Hebrew for the ground is the word Adam with an A-H on the end of it.

So God created Adam, Adam, male and female, and then God created us from the Adamah. You see the really tight connection there.

[14:44] And that's suggesting first that we, like the other land animals made on day six, we are people that come from the stuff of the world, the material. Another more pithy way to say it, we are earthy.

God made us to be earthy. We are physical. We have bodies. We have appetites. There is something similar to us and the other animals. We all share.

We get hungry. We long to eat. And one of the very first things we learn is that we're like the rest of the creatures in that way. Adam, humanity of the Adamah, the ground made from the earthy stuff, the dust as it's translated in the ESV.

But at the same time, that chorus God created from the ground or from the sea according to their kinds when it gets to us stops. That's not there.

According to the kinds, the animals all were made according to their kinds. Thus we are made in God's image. And so the next thing you see is we are earthy. We are dusty people, we might say, physical.

[15:46] And yet there's something different about us. We're creatures, but we're unique. And what is it? And it's the fact that we're made in God's image and God is a spirit. And that means we're not merely earthy or dusty.

We are in sold. We are spiritual. And so here's a really succinct way to define what a human is. A human is the meeting place between heaven and earth.

A human being is where heaven and earth meet because we are people of the earth, dusty, physical, full of appetites. Yet we are spiritual beings made by God like God with a soul.

We're embodied souls. And so in us, we are not like the animals merely earthy. We are not like the angels merely heavenly. No, we are where heaven and earth meet together.

And when you come to the New Testament, Ephesians chapter one verse 10, it says that salvation is ultimately God bringing heaven and earth together, the earthy and the spiritual.

[16:47] And that's why it is humans, we that are to be the inheritors of the kingdom. The angels, look, the angels have nothing on us. The angels cannot say this, made in God.

The angels are not earthy. They're spiritual. And the animals are not spiritual. They're earthy. But humans, we are the pinnacle creature, earthy and spiritual embodied souls.

And so that's simply, what's the lesson? It's simply this. On the one hand, there have been numerous, so many, so often attempts. We as Christians often drift into this thinking that we want to repudiate the physical life.

We in sub-Christian ways think that we're thinking christianly when we repudiate physicality and things like good food and the fact that God did make us as sexual beings.

And so many other aspects of what it means to be physical. And we can never, in other words, we're earthy. We're made to be earthy. We're Adam of the Adamah. We were made from the ground to be physical forever.

[17:55] And so anytime you are not with your body. That is a state of death. The soul goes home to be with the Lord, but it's intermediate. It's temporary.

Not to stay that way. We want to rise from the dead. We want to be physical. And at the same time, we must never repudiate or forget that there is much more to this life than what you can see with your five senses.

Here, taste touch, that you are spiritual. You are a soul. Never one against the other. Never settle, always both. Third, finally, what do we learn?

We learn thirdly that what it means to be the image of God is that we are God's image. We are God's image, you might say. In the ancient Near East, when this passage is dropped into history by God through Moses, the Israelites had left Egypt and they were about to enter the Promised Land. And they were a people who had been immersed in a world of polytheism, worshiping lots of gods. And the way that the Egyptians worshiped, the way the Babylonians worshiped, and the way that most humans, all of us, drift in our worship is that we make images.

[19:07] So this word image here, made in the image of God, you remember this word probably if you've read the Bible at all from a place like Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments. You shall not make an image.

You shall not make a graven image of God. And every single one of us, all of us humans, we drift to actually trying to picture the divine in wood and stone.

The reason Exodus 20, the second commandment exists is because God is telling us there already is an image. You don't make an image, you don't craft an image, you don't need an idol because the image of God, the likeness of God has already gone into this world.

And in the city of Edinburgh, there is 1,830 images of God per square kilometer. That's the population density of the city.

The image of God is everywhere. You don't need an image, humanity is the image of God. And yet, century after century after century, people have tried to sort of capture what the image is in a capacity or a function or an aspect of what a human is.

[20 : 20] So people, for example, have suggested, okay, what's the image? The image is our ability to think and to be able to do mathematics and to do logic and to be people of reason and intellect.

And other people have come and said, no, that's not exactly the primary image. The primary image is the ability to have the character of God and to behave morally and to be a good person and to do good things into the world.

And other people have come and said, no, the primary aspect of the image is to be a speaker, to have language like we saw just a little bit ago. And others have come and said different things.

John Locke, who is the great English philosopher of the Enlightenment, he said, our understanding and human intelligence is what makes us into the image of God.

And if that's, let me just ask you, if that's the case, if it's being intelligent, having the possibility of intelligence that makes you the image of God, what happens when you're laying in a coma in the hospital and you don't have the possibility of intelligence any longer?

[21 : 21] Is that person, your loved one, you still the image of God? And others have come like Adam Smith, you know, one of the most frequent things you see in the passage in verse 26 and 28 is that humankind was made to rule over the other creatures.

Dominion, we'll talk about this in a couple weeks, more detailed. Adam Smith, our friend whose statue is just down on the Royal Mile, he says that what makes a person the image of God is the ability to work, to create markets.

And let me ask, sure, that's an aspect of what it means to be human, but what happens when a disability strikes and you have no possibility of productivity any longer in your life?

Is that person still the image of God? And Alexis de Tocqueville, the French thinker who is really famous for basically assessing the history of the American Revolution.

He came and said, the image of God is our ability to improve ourselves and to make progress in this world. And what happens when your life is a failure and you never made any progress and you've made all the wrong decisions and you stumbled into utter chaos in your life?

[22 : 33] Are you still the image of God? And you see, every single attempt to locate the image of God throughout world history, which has been thousands, thousands and thousands of times, people have attempted it.

One falls and fails. These are all aspects, sure, of what it means to be a human, but none of them the thing, the thing that makes you the image of God.

What is it? What is it? What's the image of God? And the best way to answer it is when somebody asks you, what's the image of God? You just lift up your hand and point at other people.

Don't do it in public, you know, don't point a lot outside in the streets. But in here you can, right now, you can say, what's the image of God? And I just look around and I'll point at you. You are the image of God.

It's not an aspect, it's not a capacity, it's not an aspect of function, it's not your ability to think, it's not your ability to speak, because you could lose that.

[23 : 32] You could lose all the aspects, you can lose your ability to reason just like you can lose your hair and you're still the image of God. What is the image of God? Who are, humans are, male and female, he created them in his image.

Boys and girls, men and women, we are, we are the image of God into this world. It's as simple as that. And that means something very important today, two things, and we'll move to the close, and that's this.

One, we learn there that, that means that we are not self-made people. We're created. And we immediately on top of that have to say that we do not have the right to curate our own identities to the max.

Who are you? You're the image of God. You're not defined primarily by your feelings, you're not defined primarily by your sexuality. You're not defined primarily by your decisions, though all of it comes in as factors.

But the first thing we are told about who you are, who we are, is you are God's image, that's your fundamental identity. It can't be taken away from you. And on the one hand, that's hard news because we've suppressed that.

[24 : 41] On the other hand, it's beautiful news because you might come today thinking, I don't know what God thinks about me. And what God thinks about you is you're his image, he knows you and he loves you.

And that can never be taken away. That can never be taken away from you, it's fundamental. We're not self-made, but at the same time, we're immensely valuable.

Who among us here? If we are made as God's image, made to be God's image, made to be, you don't need a graven image because you image God into the world.

Who among us today, though, can come and say, I have made a great go of that? I have imaged God as his image into the world by reflecting his character in every way at all times.

We're more subtly, how often do we forget that we were made in God's image and live a life of practical atheism? Suppressing the reality of who we are by the simple fact that we just don't actually care very much.

[25 : 43] Boy, we're made in God's image, but we have suppressed it. We have suppressed it in unrighteousness. Let's close with this, the suppression of God's image, what do we do?

What can we do? What can we do with this? The rest of the Bible, the rest of the Bible, the rest of human history is really just the story of how much we suppress the reality of who we are.

Genesis chapter 11, Tower of Babel story, remember that they tried to build a great tower to get to the heavens to ultimately kill God. And what did they say?

They said, we want to make a name for ourselves, the suppression of God's image. We don't want to be God's image. We want to be God. We back up to Genesis chapter three.

And when the serpent came into the Garden of Eden and the serpent said to Eve with Adam standing right next to her, do you want to be like God?

[26 : 39] Do you want to be like God? What should Eve have said in that moment? I already am like God. I'm made in God's image. You know, I can't get any more like God than I am right now.

But he said, you know, what did he mean? He meant you do want to be like God. Do you want to become God? And the suppression of the truth and unrighteousness for all of human history has been, I don't want to be God's image.

I want to be the God who made me in his image. I want to trade places. I want God to be in my image. And so we craft idol after idol after idol, whether that's wood and stone or something else that we love more than him.

And we flip it upside down. Colossians chapter one verses 18 is what Paul teaches us that this is the story of humanity. The Bible doesn't actually say very much about the image of God for the rest of the Bible until you get to Colossians chapter one.

And when you get to the New Testament, to Colossians chapter one, it says in Colossians 1:15, Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God.

[27 : 49] And right in that pronouncement, on the one hand, you've got Paul saying, Jesus is like you.

You're made in God's image and he became a human. He's like you. You know, humanity existed long before Jesus was born. But on the other hand, on the other side of that, when it says he is the image, the image, there is something different between him and us.

Here we talked about how an image can be an icon, an idol in the Old Testament. And the Greek word that's used for Jesus, the image is the icon of God, the very representation of God.

We are God's image and likeness in one way. You might say, hey, I've heard this before. If you have children, you've probably heard this before. Your kids, you know, a dad, somebody looks at your son and says, your son is the spitting image of you.

Or you look at a daughter and say, that little girl is the icon in Greek, the image of her mother. But what do we mean by that? We mean she looks like her, he looks like him, but we don't think that that little girl is her mother.

[29 : 03] They are two different people. In Genesis 1, 20, 6, 28, when it says you are in his image and his likeness, it says you are the spitting image, but you are not God.

When you turn to Colossians chapter 1, verse 15, it says, but he is the image. He is the spitting image of you because he's human, but he is God.

You see, the image is the one who has visibly made the invisible God known. He is the one, he's the real deal. And that's why the scandal of the gospel is such a scandal, and it really is a scandal. And here it is, the image of God, who is the maker of heaven and earth, came into this world to be marred. The image, God himself, become human, he was marred.

We have marred, scratched, cut the image of God in us by not imaging God in all the ways we're called to. We've suppressed it, but boy, not like what happened to him at the cross.

[30 : 04] He took on the fact that we suppressed the image and injustice, and he swallowed that. And so Jesus Christ, he, the image itself, boy, he was erased.

Even more than that, the very next verse in Colossians 1 says, he upholds the universe by his voice, by the word of his power. And then you learn that in Genesis 1, the very voice of the Lord that goes forth to make the world is not just sound, it is the Son of God himself.

He is the voice. He is the one who goes forth into the world to mediate, to make possible creation. But when he comes into the world to make possible redemption, the voice of God, the speech of God to us, he was silenced.

He hung on the cross, the word silenced, the word hearing no voice from the Father, not at all. He was cut off. The image of God marred, the voice of God silenced, all so that we could be remade to become true humanity, the image of God fully and finally in forever.

Now, let me close finally with this. Some of us today, all of us today, what can you do with this? We need to come and repent. Repent in our lives for all the ways we have suppressed who we are.

[31 : 25] Every single one of us needs that in some way, shape, or form. But some of us need to come today, perhaps, and for the first time, confess that we have neglected, rejected, suppressed who we are.

We need to repent, confess, look to Jesus and come and say, I want to profess for the first time God made me. And come and be baptized. You might be at that place today where the next step for you is to repent and be baptized.

And the rest of us, all of us today, need some form of repentance for the ways that even as Christians, we're still suppressing who we are and unrighteousness.

We drift, we're modern people. GK Chesterton captured this so well at the end of his life. He talked about in the early 20th century when he was writing, he talked about a modern man, he said, who will denounce the policeman for killing a peasant, treating a peasant like a beast.

And he said, and then he will turn around and prove by the highest philosophical principle that the peasant ought to have killed himself. He says, in other words, the man of this school goes first to a political meeting to complain of how the savages are being treated in a colonial era, that they're being treated like beast.

[32 : 46] And then he turns, takes his hat, his umbrella, to go to a scientific meeting where he decides, he decides scientifically, actually, we are all savages and beasts. You see the contradiction of modernity?

On the one hand, we walk around in the street saying, we're all just beasts, savages, just a little bit more mutated than the apes. On the other hand, we say, but the United Nations has declared we have 39 rights.

We say, humans are beast, humans are precious, we walk in a world of utter contradiction. God made you. God knows you.

God loves you. In Jesus Christ, he became the image to redeem you as his image. God loves every single person, and he wants you to come to him.

Will you come? Let us pray. Father, we give you thanks that whether we have high self-esteem today or low self-esteem, the same answer is what we need.

[33 : 47] You made us in your image, you know us, you love us. So we repent, we confess this morning that we try to be self-made people, we can't do it.

And so Lord, I pray that you would break our hearts and then remake our hearts. Born again in the image of the sun. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for giving everything for us.
And we pray that we would be renewed to long to leave this place walking not only as your image but behaving, living, worshiping, growing to image you into this world.
And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.