

Then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over all the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

Back in 1992, Tim Stafford wrote the following in *Christianity Today*: "A pastor I know, Stephen Belynskyj, starts each confirmation class with a jar full of beans. He asks his students to guess how many beans are in the jar, and on a big pad of paper writes down their estimates. Then, next to those estimates, he helps them make another list: their favorite songs. When the lists are complete, he reveals the actual number of beans in the jar. The whole class looks over their guesses, to see which estimate was closest to being right.

Belynskyj then turns to the list of favorite songs, and asks, "Now, which one of *these* is closest to being right?" The students protest that there is no "right answer to that question"; a person's favorite song is just a matter of taste.

Belynskyj then asks the students, "OK, then, when you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the number of beans, or more like choosing your favorite song?" Always, the pastor says, from old and young alike, he gets the same answer: Choosing one's faith is more like choosing a favorite

song.¹ There is no right or wrong answer, they claim – it's just a matter of taste."

A. W Tozer writes, "The church today has gotten accustomed to the blurred puffs of gray fog that pass for doctrine, and we expect nothing better. We've gotten used to vague statements of a milky mixture of Scripture, science, and human sentiment that is true to none of its ingredients. Little by little, Christians these days are being brainwashed. ...They say they believe, but their beliefs have been so diluted as to be impossible of clear definition."

I give these as just a couple more encouragements that we're doing the right thing by continuing in this series on theology. For two weeks, we looked at the question, "Who is God?" And from Jesus' teaching on the Lord's Prayer, we concluded that God is, for starters, honest and honorable; He's omniscient – which means, He knows everything, He's communicative, and fatherly. God is in Heaven, God is holy, God is a King, a provider, a forgiver, and a protector.

Today, we consider the next question, "Who is humanity?" Who are you? Who am I? Who is man? Who is woman?

Finding truthful answers to this question is more important than we might think. The way we answer this

¹ Tim Stafford, *Christianity Today*, September 14, 1992, p. 36.

affects so much in our culture today. Typically, secular views of humanity err in that they are either overly optimistic or too pessimistic in their estimates of human nature. How we view ourselves and one another has everything to do with our worth as persons. It affects how we treat ourselves, our bodies, and each other. It affects the rules we make, the laws we live by, and the ethics we practice. Do we have value? Are we worth more than just the sum of our parts? Is human life worth preserving? Are we any different than whales or cows or chickens or lizards?

It was back in 1932 that the psychologist Henry Link, who came to faith in Christ through studying the psychological aspects of Scripture, said, “The greatest and most authentic textbook on personality is still the Bible, and the discoveries which psychologists make tend to confirm rather than contradict the ideas of personality found there.”²

What does it mean to be human? If you have a Bible with you, turn to Genesis 1, would you? Genesis 1, verse 26. Genesis chapter 1, verse 26, “Then God said, let us make man...”

“*Let us make man*...which means here, humanity, men and women, the whole human race.”

Who is humanity? We are creatures made by God – let’s get that clear. We’re *not* here by *accident*. We’re

² Link, Henry. 1937. The return to religion. New York, NY: The Macmillan company.

here by incident. And the *incident* was God-willed, God-planned, and God-caused.

Now, we’re not given here in Genesis a point by point scientific paper on the creation of man and woman. The intention of the creation account here is not necessarily to answer all of our 21st century biological and chemical and psychological questions about the details of this event. There are just some things that we’ll never know, on this side of eternity, about exactly *how* we were made.

However, Scripture is very clear on this: *God made us*, deliberately. If Christians choose to walk away from that revelation and move toward the idea that we just somehow *happened*, we walk away from our essential nature as intentionally made creatures of God. Christians should not be playing around with the idea of a per chance assembly of humanity. That notion not only diminishes the validity and the authority of Scripture, it diminishes who we are – it lessens who we are as the special creations of God.

Let’s take a mental walk, OK? Out into the parking lot. I want you to see my truck – it’s a red Toyota pickup. Picture it in your mind...have you got it? Now, you should know that there are *some people* who *believe* that this truck was made as a result of someone’s design. There are people who believe that somebody figured out how all these parts could be made and how they could work together and then that person made the

parts and put the parts together intentionally, to make this truck.

Some people believe that. But let me tell you what really happened...

Many, many centuries ago, all this iron and glass and rubber and plastic and fabric and wires just came up out of the ground and began to form *themselves* into different shapes and sizes. Through the years, holes evolved in the steel and plastic at just the right places and the upholstery began to weave itself together. After a while, threads appeared on the bolts and nuts and, amazing as it may seem, each bolt found a nut with exactly matching threads, and gradually, everything just sort of screwed itself up into place. A little later, glass that had shaped itself just right glued itself in place here on the windshield. The tires became round over the years and they found themselves the right size metal wheels and one day they just popped right on. And then they filled themselves with air and suddenly, the thing just began to roll down the street.

And then one day, centuries ago, some people were walking along and they found it sitting under a tree, and they looked at it and thought, "How amazing! I think we'll call it, 'truck.'"

But that's not all! These trucks have a way of multiplying themselves year after year. They even change slightly as time goes on to meet the demands of

the public. They do this all on their own – a chance thing. The process is called "autolution."

That doesn't make a bit of sense, does it? No it doesn't. Talk about an act of faith...it takes much more faith to believe that, than it does to believe that my truck is the *product* of *someone, somewhere*, who intentionally *designed* and *built* it with a purpose.

God said, "Let us make man..." and that's exactly what happened. We're created by God.

Verse 26, God said, "Let us make man *in our image, in our likeness.*"

Humanity is made by God, and we're made according to a model, and the model is God himself. Now, what does that mean, to be made in God's image? Does He look like me, like Jimmy Larsen did a couple weeks ago? Or is there more to it than that?

This issue of the Imago Dei, the image of God, has been discussed and debated for centuries, but most who have tackled it have agreed that being made in God's image means, not so much that we look like Him, but that we share characteristics with Him that no other creature shares. Let's look at probably the four most important of these this morning.

First, we're created in God's image in that we, like God, have a *moral instinct* or a *moral responsibility*. To have an internal moral compass, a conscience, to be able

to recognize a difference between right and wrong is a uniquely human thing. Now dogs and horses, even Guinea Pigs can be trained to do or not to do things – they can learn that if they chew on that, if they eat that, they’ll get swatted on the nose, and the swat will hurt so they won’t do that anymore. But that’s just training. A moral compass is more than that. It’s having, on the inside, a basic idea of right and wrong. The very fact that the concepts of “right” and “wrong” exist in our language is proof we are different from the rest of creation. A hamster or a whale doesn’t ponder what is right and wrong in a given situation. Yet, all through Scripture, beginning clear back in chapter three of Genesis, God appeals to our moral compass that we might do the right thing over the wrong. God communicates with no other creature in that way. We share God’s image through a *moral instinct*.

Second, we share God’s image in that we have the unique *ability to think and reason*. How many good, philosophical discussions have you had lately with your German Shepherd or with your parakeet? How many dogwood trees or holly bushes attended the Sister to Sister groups this fall for Bible study and prayer?

Don’t get me wrong, animals have brains, but they’re not like the human brain. Humans have a unique ability to think. What’s more, humans can not only think, but we can think about thinking. We can analyze the way we think. We’re self-reflective. We can think about ourselves and the things we do. We can think

logically. And not only can we think logically, we can think about thinking logically. We can put complex words and ideas together.

It wasn’t the elephant who named Adam, you know. It was Adam who named the elephant and all the other animals there in Genesis 2. It was Adam and Eve with whom God communicated. As far as I know, to this day, the Bible has not been translated into Goldfish. To be human is to have unique mental capacities, not exactly like God’s, but more like that of God than like that of the other animals. To be created in God’s image means having the ability to think and reason.³

Third, being made in God’s image means that we have a free will. God was not bound to create the heavens and the earth. He was not pushed or manipulated into creating you and me, as if anyone could manipulate Him. God has the capacity to choose freely, and this is a mark of His image that we bear. Now I realize that this issue has been debated with our Christian brothers and sisters who hold to an extreme form of Calvinism (might I add, a form that even John Calvin would not support.) But here’s where I, and Methodism, and most of historical Christianity, stand on this: To me, a quick look through the Old or New Testament pretty clearly indicates that, either this book was written to try to *trick* us into *believing* that we have a free will, *or* human beings really *do* have the freedom to choose this or that path...to make this or that decision. W. T.

³(Gen 2:19-20; Isa 1:18; Rom 1:19-21; 1 Cor 13:11)

Purkiser writes, “If one believes that God is honest in His revelation, then one sees a pervasive assumption in Scripture of real human freedom. Every entreaty, command, or rebuke we find in here assumes that there can be no accountability without responsibility; and there can be no responsibility without some measure of real freedom.”⁴

When Joshua said to Israel in Joshua 24:15 “Choose this day whom you will serve,” was that not a genuine command for a genuine choice? When God says in Joel 2:12, “Return to me with all your heart;” when He says in Zechariah 1:3 “Return to me and I will return to you,” is He not requesting that His people make a real decision? Or is God trying to fool us into believing we’re able to make decisions? When Jesus says in John 7:17, “If anyone *chooses* to do God’s will,” is He merely trying to trick us into believing that we have a choice in the matter? When Jesus or Paul or Peter or John gives any one of the hundreds of commands and exhortations they give in here to Christians...do this, don’t do this, think about these things, walk in these ways, is this not evidence enough that humans have a free will, just like God has a free will? In my opinion, either it is, or 90% of this book is deceptive at its core.

Scripture presupposes that human beings can make real decisions. And of course how we exercise that will determines whether we have a happy or a miserable life

⁴ Purkiser, W.T.. 1977. *God, Man, and Salvation*. Kansas City, KS: Beacon Hill Press.

here and hereafter. Humanity bears God’s image in that we have a free will.⁵

Fourth, we share God’s image in that we have a unique ability to create. Through art, through music, through architecture, through literature, through language, through technology, we have the ability to create. Professor Ben Durr writes how he’s heard stories about animals, like apes, being taught to make strokes on canvas with a paintbrush (which were then probably sold for big bucks to gullible people as prized artistic creations). But training a monkey to move a paintbrush around is a far cry from an idea being nurtured in the human mind and then expressed artistically through a delicate painting. A chimp may be able to stack bricks one on top of another, but a chimp is utterly incapable of constructing the Pyramids, or the Washington Monument, or the Eiffel Tower, or St. John’s Cathedral. Our ability, in fact, our need to create, to produce something of beauty and value bears witness to God’s image upon us.

In these ways and others, humanity is unique. We are made in God’s image.

OK then so what? So we were created by God in His image. Practically speaking, what does that mean?

⁵(Gen 1:27; Josh 24:15; Prov 1:23-31; Matt 23:37; John 7:17; Acts 7:51-53; Rom 10:3-13; Gal 1:6; Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:15-22)

Well, it means plenty. It means that humans are *special and valuable*. We're valuable before we're born, after we're too old to be particularly useful, if we're born with physical or mental problems, if we're born red or yellow, black or white...it doesn't matter. Human beings were created by God in His image, and that alone makes us of great value to Him. He loves us, collectively, and individually. Even through we've fallen into sin and God's image in us has been marred, (which we'll talk about next week), still we are unique and loved of God. We need to begin to see ourselves and others from this point of view – *God's* point of view.

What that means is, we're to treat others, all people, with a holy respect. We're not to *use* people or *abuse* them. We're not to dispose of people or take advantage of them. This is why there are so many moral commands in Scripture – God is trying to teach us about who we are – to protect us from ourselves. The image of God upon humanity is the basis for all of the interpersonal moral commands of Scripture. They teach us to respect and preserve all God's creation because it belongs to God, but above all, they teach us to not defile *people*, because they are the *pinnacle* of creation.

In his book, 'The Weight of Glory,' C. S. Lewis says, "There are no ordinary *people*. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - 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. ...Next to the

Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses."

God says, "Treat each other with honor, because every human bears God's image."

Knowing that we're created in God's image needs also to affect the ways we see *ourselves* and *treat* ourselves. Because we're important to God, we honor God by treating ourselves with honor and self-respect - keeping our minds and bodies from sin; from sinful, polluting thoughts and behavior. To give ourselves to impurity and unholiness is an affront to God, our creator. He made us to be clean and good, and in this book, He's given us instructions on how to remain that way, or how to return to that way.

God's image bearers cannot simply do whatever they like with themselves and with others. If we are created by God, if we bear God's image, then we have a responsibility, an *accountability*, whether we like it or not. This goes for all humanity, but especially for followers of Christ. Who we are, how we see ourselves and others, what we do with ourselves and others speaks volumes to our world about the God we serve. Do we take Him seriously? Do we embrace who we are before Him?

The challenge for us is this: develop a Biblical picture of what it means to be human; not to underestimate ourselves, because God has made us to be special. At the same time, we don't dare overestimate

ourselves, and compete with God for the throne of the universe. Because of the fall, we're tend toward either one or the other extreme. And you only have to look around in our culture to see the effects of that. Some think they're worthless. Others think they're God. The Bible says neither – let's look to it for the truth about who we are and who God would have us be.

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Know who you are before God.
Hear His word about you and His love for you.
Receive Jesus Christ, who was sent to redeem you,
And live in harmony and right relationship with God,
your Father.