

Sanctity of Life Sunday 2014

The Imago Dei * Genesis 1:26-28

Please take your Bibles and turn with me to Genesis 1. Today for the third year in a row on the third Sunday in January I am going to preach a message on the sanctity of human life. The reason I am doing so is that I truly believe there are few issues more pressing in our day and time, and I hope to convince you today that this is the case. Listen, your theology of life – and make no mistake, you have one – affects almost every aspect of your existence.

Let me put it another way. How you understand the meaning of life impacts how you relate to God, how you relate to yourself, how you relate to others, and how you relate to the world in which you live. Since this is the case, there really is no more significant issue.

Now, the last two years I have primarily focused on the topic of abortion, and for good reason, but today I want to step back and zero in on the foundational Bible doctrine related to the sanctity of life, and that is the doctrine of the image of God, what is known in Latin as the *Imago Dei*, hence the title for this message. And while there are a number of different passages we are going to look at today, our launching point is the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1.

As you know, here at the beginning of the Bible, we have the recording of the six days of creation. And in these six days we see God creating lots of things, lots of good things. In fact, verse 31 tells us that God saw all that He had created and it was very good. What's interesting is that in verse 25, He says that it was good. Just good. Only after He creates one special thing do we see it changed from good to very good. Do you know what that special thing is? Well, it's man. Look at verse 26:

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.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 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.” (Genesis 1:26-28, ESV)

Now, starting from this passage I want to show you five big-picture truths about man’s creation and its resulting implications.

1. Man was created in the image of God.

Number one, man was created in the image of God. Look again at the first sentence in verse 26, one of the most important sentences in the Bible:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

When God created man, He made man in His image and likeness. Now, quick side note, the term *man* might be more clearly stated *humankind* or *humans*. It’s a reference to both men and women, as verse 27 makes clear. *Man* here includes both male and female. I don’t want you ladies to feel left out; everything that we talk about today includes you.

Now, what exactly does it mean to be created in God’s image and likeness? Well the words image and likeness are essentially synonyms and both refer to something that is similar to but not identical to the thing it is like or is an image of. This doesn’t mean that man is God, but rather that man is like God and has been chosen to represent Him before the rest of creation.

To help us grasp this, turn to Genesis 5. Look at verses 1-3:

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. Genesis 5:1-3 (ESV)

The same words that describe the relationship between God and Adam in chapter one are used to describe the relationship between Seth and Adam here in chapter 5. Seth was like Adam and, as His son, represented Adam but of course Seth wasn't Adam.

Now, let's talk about how man is like God. To do so, we need to think in terms of abilities and relationships. By this I mean that God has given man abilities that are similar to His. For example, we are similar to God in that we are intelligent, creative, communicating beings. God is all of these things, and so are the people He creates. Now, there are a lot of other abilities that we could mention, and this does not mean we all have the same abilities or degrees of abilities, but rather that all humans have abilities like God through which they reflect and represent who He is.

At the same time, being made in God's image also means that we are placed in relationships in which we use our abilities to reflect and represent God to the rest of creation. And what I am going to share with you right now is absolutely huge to the rest of the message, so pay close attention, as I will refer to it over and over again. The Bible tells us that being created in God's image means that man has four primary relationships.

Man Has Four Primary Relationships

- **With God**

First, man has a relationship with God. This is easy to understand but what we can't miss is that this is man's first and foremost relationship. Man was primarily created to commune with God and bring glory to Him and he does so through his God-given abilities. So, everyone here has the ability to communicate. And why do we have the ability to communicate? Well, the primary reason is so we can commune with God and bring glory to Him. That's why we exist.

- **With Others**

Second, man has a relationship with others. Look again at verse 27:

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

We have a tendency to understand this verse as primarily explaining that there are different sexes. However, what is really in view is that humans were created as social beings. We were created to live in relationship with others. God Himself is a relational being, and those who are made in His image are relational beings as well. And once again, we have been given gifts so that we may relate to others in a way that brings good to them and glory to God.

- **With Nature**

Third, man has a relationship with nature. Look at verse 28:

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."

Here we are told that God has tasked man with ruling over nature as His representative. We see this by the use of the terms *subdue* and *dominion*. But it is important to note that the proper relationship of man to nature includes more than simply ruling over it. When we turn to Genesis 2 we see God tasking Adam to work and care for the Garden of Eden. The idea here is one of stewardship; not only is nature to serve man but man is also to serve nature. This means that while we are above nature we are to use our God-given authority and abilities to preserve its usefulness and beauty for His glory.¹

- **With Himself**

¹ Hoekema, Anthony A. Pg. 79-80. (1986) *Created in God's Image*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI.

Fourth, man has a relationship with himself. Although this relationship is not specifically mentioned here in Genesis 1, it is certainly implied and can clearly be seen in other passages of Scripture. And we all get this, right? We all have a way that we think about, consider, and even communicate to ourselves. In fact, do you realize that you communicate with yourself more than anyone else? And while there are different terms we can use to describe our relationship with ourselves, I believe the most helpful and biblical one is self-image, what dictionary.com describes as *the idea, conception or mental image one has of oneself*.² Self-image is essentially how we see ourselves.

Now, here's the big point we need to get about all of these relationships. When God first created Adam and Eve all of their relationships functioned perfectly. Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship with God, a perfect relationship with one another, a perfect relationship with creation, and perfect relationships with themselves. They perfectly imaged God in every single way. If we could get in a time machine and go back to the Garden of Eden, we would see that before the fall, Adam and Eve reflected and represented God without error. We would see man as he was originally created to be. That's why verse 31 tells us that God saw all that he had made and considered it very good.

2. Sin has corrupted the image of God in man.

Now, I wish that this was all there was to say about the image of God. However, we know that things didn't stay the way God originally created them to be. That's why the second truth about the image of God is that sin has corrupted it. And we only have to go three chapters into the Bible to see how that happened. God placed Adam and Eve in a perfect world and told them they could do pretty much anything they wanted except for one thing. But much like young children, instead of doing everything they could have done, they decided to do the one thing that they were told not to do, and as a result sin entered into the world, and along with it complete and utter devastation, both for Adam and Eve and for everyone who has been

² dictionary.com

born since. And the effects of their sin can be most clearly seen in the four relationships we just discussed. Let's consider how this is the case.

First, instead of using his gifts to serve God, man now uses his gifts to serve himself. Instead of using the gift of communication to praise God, man curses Him. Instead of using the gift of intelligence to honor God, he uses it to defy Him. Instead of using the gift of creativity to worship God, he uses it in the worship of other things. If you want a great description of this, just read Romans 1 sometime. If you want to know how someone can worship a rock, a plant, a building, an animal, a football team, or another person, here is your answer. Sin has corrupted man's relationship with God and leads him to worship created things instead of the creator.

Second, instead of relating with others in a way that enriches, encourages and points them to God, man manipulates, tears down and points them in the opposite direction. This, of course is revealed everyday in the news and even in our own households. This is why over 54 million unborn babies have been murdered in our country over the last 40 years. This is why we have the social strife we do. Let just pull over here and park for just a minute. There are so many things I really want to say today but I am not going to have time for, but I just have to get this in. Do you realize that one of the root causes of abortion, sex trafficking, euthanasia, racism and all other forms of abuse is the failure to recognize the image of God in people? When we devalue life in any way we are failing to understand that every human being is made in the image of God and therefore every human being has value and worth. And just to be clear, every human being has equal value and worth. Red, yellow, black, white, born, unborn, young, old, rich, poor, healthy, sick, all are precious in His sight. Why? Because God is precious and therefore those who are made in His image are precious. Listen, you can't think God is precious and not consider His supreme creation to be precious as well. As John Piper says, "You cannot worship and glorify the majesty of God while treating his supreme creation with contempt." Ok, so let's put the car back in drive get back to the outline.

Third, because of sin, instead of caring for nature, man exploits and abuses it for his own gain without thought as to how to steward it for God's glory. There are lots of illustrations we can give here, but just look at our world and how we abuse it with little thought for the future. Instead of stewarding creation we exploit it. Now listen, I am not a tree hugger, unless of course I am in my tree stand. I get that humans are much more valuable than plants and animals, but that doesn't mean we just use them any old way we want; no, we are to steward them in a way that honors the fact that they are God's creation and allows them to be enjoyed by future generations.

Fourth, because of sin, instead of having a proper self-image, man tends to either self-love or self-loath. He tends to think either too highly of himself or not highly enough. Because of sin man also struggles with fear, guilt, and feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. Before sin, Adam and Eve never experienced any of these things. Can you imagine looking in the mirror and always being satisfied with what you saw? Can you imagine living without a fear of anything? Can you imagine having a conscience that is guilt-free? How about never feeling inadequate or worthless? That was Adam and Eve's experience before sin. However, that's not the case for any of us. Because of sin we all struggle with these issues.

Right now I want to take another short excursion and go a little deeper in regards to self-image. There are some of you who really need to recognize that sin is causing you to look outside of your relationship with God for your sense of value and worth. It's probably fair to say all of us are doing this in some way, but some of us are really struggling with it. So listen. Your value does not come from your looks or your intelligence or your accomplishments or what others think of you. Your value comes from whose image you are made in. God doesn't make junk and He has made you just the way He wants you, to reflect and represent Him in your own unique way. And until you recognize, affirm, and grow in your understanding of this, you are going to look to other things to provide you with the sense of worth that you can only find in a relationship with your Creator.

So, in short, the result of sin is the mess that we are in today. All the problems we face are the result of sin corrupting the image of God in us. While God created us to bring glory to Him, blessings to others, and care to nature – sin has corrupted all of these things and left us in chaos.

3. Jesus died to renew the image of God in man.

But you know what, thankfully that isn't the end of the story. The third truth regarding the image of God is that Jesus died to renew it. A key passage here is Romans 8:29:

For those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29, ESV)

Image of his Son here is equivalent to *image of God*, meaning that God has predestined, or has chosen to renew His image in those who believe in His Son. Ephesians 1 tells us that He determined to do this before time began and that He accomplishes it through the blood of Jesus Christ, for the praise of His glory.

Now, do you get what this means? It means that although the image of God has been corrupted in man, God is in the process of renewing His image in certain people through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son.

Now, that said, it's important to note that the image of God is being renewed and not yet completely renewed. Believers in Jesus are new, but not completely new. Being conformed to the image of God is a process. We can see this reality in passages such as Colossians 3:

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices **10** and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (Colossians 3:9-10, ESV)*

So what exactly does this mean about the relationships we have been talking about? Practically speaking, it means that those who are being renewed can and will strive to relate to God, others, nature and themselves in the way in which God originally created them to. Just look at Colossians 3 for a moment. Why does Paul tell us not to lie to one another? Because we have put on a new self, which is in the process of becoming what it was created to be – the perfect image of God.

I hope you get how wonderful this is. Above all else, it gives us incredible hope. It means that we can experience the joy, blessings, and fulfillment that God intended for our relationships to provide. It means that we can have what we have always truly desired to have. It means that we can be all that we were created to be. Do you remember the old Army commercial? *Be all that you can be in the Army*. Well, I don't know how true that is or not, but I do know if we are truly going to be all that we can be we have to be in Jesus, because it is in Him through which the image of God in us is renewed.

4. Jesus is returning to restore the image of God in man.

Now, as great as this is, there is something even better and that leads to the fourth truth about the image of God: Jesus is returning to restore it.

1 Corinthians 15:49 tells us this:

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:49, ESV)

The man of dust here is Adam, and the man of heaven is Jesus. Since Adam is the father of all mankind, every human is born in his image, meaning that all humans are sinners just as he was. However, those who have faith in Jesus are not only born in the image of Adam but are also reborn in the image of Jesus, and one day when He returns they will be made completely and perfectly like Him.

Here's another passage that explains it a little differently. 1 John 3:2:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2, ESV)

Is there a Bible verse better than this one? There is a day when Jesus is coming back, and on that day we will be made completely like Him. Think about this, friends. There is a day coming when the clouds are going to part, the sky is going to break open and Jesus is going to appear in all His glory and fully restore the image of God in us, with all the blessings and benefits that this includes. What's even better yet, we will experience these benefits for all eternity without the possibility of them being taken away from us. Let me point out to you that this means we will actually find ourselves in a better state than Adam and Eve were in the Garden. Adam and Eve were perfect but they still had the potential to sin. When Jesus returns we will be made perfect and will have absolutely zero chance of sinning. In other words, once we are perfect there will be no chance of that perfection being ruined. We will relate to God, others, nature, and ourselves perfectly, forever. Can anyone say amen to that?

All right, now I want to give an illustration that I hope will bring this all together for you. A good way to think of the image of God is to consider it as a mirror. When God originally created Adam, he was a perfect mirror. He reflected who God was perfectly. So here I have a mirror. It gives a perfect reflection of what I look like. That's how it was for Adam and Eve before the fall. If we were to have seen Adam and Eve prior to sin, they would have perfectly reflected who God is. However, when sin entered into the world, the mirror that was Adam and Eve was broken. Now, what do we know about a broken mirror? It still reflects an image, but very imperfectly. So, here I have a broken mirror. If I look at it I can see my reflection – sort of. There are parts of me that are somewhat clear, but other parts that are really distorted. That's what happened with Adam and Eve – and with every human being since. Nevertheless, all humans, even unbelievers, still have the image of God and so in some way reflect God's image. But that doesn't

change the fact that the mirror is still badly broken and reflects God very poorly. However, the wonderful truth is that Jesus came and died to put the mirror back together again. This is the process of renewal – what we normally call sanctification. It's the process whereby we regain the ability to accurately reflect the image of God. This is the process in which all of us who are believers are in today. The Holy Spirit is gradually making us more like Jesus and therefore more accurately able to show others who God truly is. And then, of course, the final part in the illustration is that one day Jesus is coming back and at that time He will restore our mirror to perfection. We will be able to accurately reflect the image of God as we were originally created to do.

So, let me say it one more way to make sure you understand it, this time using image as a verb and not a noun. Man was created to image God, because of sin he no longer images God as he should, believers are now being empowered by the Holy Spirit to image God more and more accurately; one day believers will image God perfectly.³

5. Jesus is the perfect image of God.

Ok, so let me add a final big-picture truth about the image of God, a truth that leads to the major application point of this message. Here it is: Jesus is the perfect image of God. If we want to know what the image of God is really like, we must look to Jesus. Hebrews 1:

[The Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. (Hebrews 1:3, ESV)

The phrase *exact imprint* refers to a stamp that is used to make a coin. And just as you can tell by looking at a coin what the original die that was used to stamp the coin looked like, so you can tell by looking at Jesus what God the Father is like. God the Son is the perfect representation of God the Father.⁴ This is why Jesus could tell Phillip in John 14:

³ Hoekema, Anthony A. Pg. 28. (1986) *Created in God's Image*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI.

⁴ Ibid, p. 21

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9, ESV)

This means that the best way to find out what the image of God is like is not by looking to Adam and Eve before the fall, or to another human being, or even to compare and contrast man with the rest of creation, but rather to look to Jesus. He gives us the perfect picture of what it means to image God.

Further, and here is the big application point, the way that we are renewed in the image of God is by looking at Jesus. Here's what 2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18, ESV)

Now, stick with me here, because you just have to get this. The way that we become like Jesus is by looking to Jesus. As we behold His glory we are gradually, moment-by-moment and day-by-day transformed into His image. As we learn who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He is like, the Holy Spirit changes us into people who think, act, and look like Him. We become people who image God in the way that we were originally created to. So do you get the application point here? If we are going to reflect the image of God, if we are going to be good mirrors, we must continually look to Jesus. I want to remind you that 2 Corinthians 3:18 is the passage I preached from when I candidated here, because this is pretty much the foundation of everything I try to do as your pastor. I try to get you to look to Jesus because I know that as you do, the Holy Spirit will transform you into His image, which will result in much glory to God and lots of joy for you.

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