

Man and Woman in God's Image (Genesis 1:26-27)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church, July 29, 2007

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The secular world portrays man in the long line of animals, a supposed common ancestor of monkeys and men that developed from lower hominids to homo sapiens by naturalism over millions of years of struggle and survival of the fittest until finally the brains and languages developed beyond grunts into what we are today. Evolution portrays mankind in the likeness of animals, but God's Word presents man in the likeness of God by special creation.

The two views can never be reconciled and could never be more different. It makes all the difference in the world in terms of morality and how you live whether you believe we are basically a glorified gorilla, or if you believe you're in the image of a personal, loving but Holy, Creator God you're accountable to, who hates sin and who created you with purpose, for His glory.

There's big technical and scientific terms used, but evolution is essentially saying that over millions of years, molecules eventually evolved into me and you, protoplasm eventually developed higher life forms including people, life developed from a primordial slime or goo to creatures that developed into all the animals in the zoo then the highest animals (you). From start to finish it is molecules to men, protoplasm to persons, or going from the goo to the zoo to you (encouraging?)

If you see frog turn to a prince rapidly, every child knows that's a fairy tale or fiction story, but if you slow it down millions of years in between, most call that science. In reality, it's science fiction.

It's only the Bible that gives man true dignity, worth and purpose. And this passage has proved to be such an important basis for this and all of life.

OUTLINE:

1. **Divine Persons** – “Let us make man” (last week)
 2. **Divine Pattern** – “in our image, in our likeness”
 3. **Divine Purpose** – “let them have dominion” (to be image-bearers on earth, i.e., God's representative and reflection of His glory)
- The grammar of this phrase indicates *purpose* (NET Bible Notes)

DIVINE PATTERN – “in our image, in our likeness”

Last week it took us quite awhile to get through the phrase “let us make man” as there is so much meaning and significance and theological truth behind those first four words in this verse. The next three words “in our image” are even more so - there is more literature written on the image of God than just about any other phrase in Genesis, and I literally have probably read 100-200 pages worth of material on what different commentators and theologians have written about what the image of God is. Verse 26 is so rich and full of depth and each phrase is pregnant with meaning and opens up a panorama of scriptural truth as well as a Pandora's box of interpretive

challenges. The text clearly asserts that we are made in God's image, but it does not clearly define exactly what that is, which is part of why there is so much written on this.

First, some general observations:

- I use the word "divine pattern" for this point because the word "likeness" actually means "pattern" (Vine's Dictionary) and the Hebrew preposition before it makes a stronger "close connexion with something ... following some kind of pattern ... or in a comparison, as in Gn 1:26"¹
- Mankind is made in the image, likeness, or pattern of God. We are like God in some way, which we'll try and understand more a little later what that is
- The words "image" and "likeness" are not two separate or unrelated things, but both complement each other and communicate the same idea in strong terms
 - o There is no "and" between image and likeness in the Hebrew, it's all one phrase in the original
 - o Verse 27 summarizes as just saying we're made in the image of God after verse 26 says "in our image, according to our likeness" – it is accurate to sum that up as simply being made in the image of God
 - o 5:1 summarizes the other way as being made "in the likeness of God" and then 5:3 uses the two terms in reverse order "in his own likeness, according to his image" as meaning the same thing
 - o The older Lutheran theologians were correct in stating that the two words are synonymous, and are merely combined to add intensity to the thought: "an image which is like Us" (*Luther*)²

The word "man" (*adam*) in v. 26 is collective, it refers to mankind:

- Because verse 26b says "let *them* rule / have dominion"
- Verse 27 clearly states man includes both male and female, both are equally in the image of God when "He created *them*"
- We also see this in later verses

Genesis 5:1-3 (NASB95)

1 This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created **man**, He made him in the likeness of God.

2 He created **them** male and female, and He blessed them and **named them Man [*adam*]** in the day when they were created.

3 When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son **in his own likeness, according to his image**, and named him Seth.

Notice a couple other things about this text.

- Verse 2 refers to "them" and again clarifies that man includes male and female and both are blessed
- At the end of the verse God names both of them Man (*adam*). Feminists may not like the word "man" being used generically, or the idea that in marriage both man and woman are given the name of the man, but they really should not argue against God and His Word because it is the Bible alone of all ancient literature that gives true worth and dignity and value to women. Women are equally in God's image, but not identical in their role as

we'll see later. Part of why I think some feminists are so frustrated is because they are outside of the roles God intended them

Male and female are created equal yet different

It's been well said: 'Men are not women, and women are not men. One of the saddest signs of our culture's depravity is the amount and the degree of gender confusion today. It is vain to wonder if men or women are superior to the other. A man is absolutely superior at being a man. A woman is absolutely superior at being a woman. But when a man tries to be a woman or a woman tries to be a man, you have something inferior.'³

- The likeness and image was not limited to Adam and Eve, as verse 3 says, it was passed down to their son
- Interestingly, the genealogy in Luke 3 traces back to creation and ends with "Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (3:38)
- Of course, Luke's gospel shows that Jesus is *the Son of God* in fullest sense – N.T. also shows He's the full image

What the Image of God does NOT mean (3 things)

1. Does not mean we are divine

We are still creatures and there is always a creature-Creator distinction, there's always a gap between man and his Maker.

We are like God more than the animals, but there is always a vast distance between God and man. Only Jesus Christ is the *express* image of God's person as Hebrews 1:3 says, and only He can claim the exact same nature as His Father (a claim that in John 5:18 made the Jews want to stone Him).

This is precisely the area where cults and false religions go astray, in understanding Christ's relation to God and mankind's relation to God.

Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy urges that [God's image in Genesis 1:26] means that "man and woman—as coexistent and eternal with God—forever reflect, in glorified quality, the infinite Father-Mother God" (Eddy, 516).

CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION: Eddy completely misunderstands this passage of Scripture. Several mistakes will be briefly noted.

It is contrary to the meaning of the words "image" and "likeness" to insist that humankind is like God in all respects. Even an "image" in this context is not the same as the original, as is clear from the use of this same Hebrew word (*tzehelem*) of an idol (e.g., Num. 33:52; 2 Chron. 23:17; Ezek. 7:20) as only a *representation* of the god, not the god itself.

The word *create* reveals that the text is not speaking of something that is eternal but of something that came to be. This word (*bara*) is never used in the Old Testament of something that is eternal. Indeed, in this context it means something that is brought into being. The same is true of the New Testament use of the word for "create" (cf. Col. 1:15–16; Rev. 4:11). Also, it is a

fallacy to assume, as Eddy does, that because we are like God, God must be like us. For example, she speaks of God as ... (“Father-Mother God”). This is known in logic as an *illicit conversion*.⁴

God is not like us! Remember the great indictment in Psalm 50:21 is when God rebukes the Israelites who had a low view of Him by saying “you thought I was just like you”

It’s in chapter 3 that Satan will tempt Eve with a desire to become like God beyond the bounds God had set for our closeness with Him. To try and bring ourselves up to be God seems to be the original sin of Lucifer, and also a great temptation for man to either exalt ourselves to God’s place or to bring God down to our level

2. It also does not mean PHYSICAL IMAGE

Ray Stedman writes that

The Mormons (among others) teach that the image of God is the physical body of man; that is what is made after the image of God. They base this upon certain anthropomorphic expressions in the Scripture, those expressions which seem to impute human features to God, e.g., the eyes of God, the fingers of God, the hands of God, etc. The Mormons take these literally and say they prove that God does indeed have a body like our body. This is fundamental to the teachings of the Mormon faith. They fail to see that they are really turning the whole issue around and saying that it is God who is made in the image of man. If, in this sense, man is in the image of God, then it is also true that apes and monkeys are made in the image of God, because bodily they look very much like us.⁵

The cults often go astray on the first page of the Bible. Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, deny that there was a personal Spirit of God in verse 2, but instead they see it as some impersonal force or wind moving over the waters. Cults would also deny what we saw last week about the Trinity (“Let us make man in our image”)

Mormons argue that, because humans were created with a body of flesh and bones, God the Father must have a physical body, since humanity was created in God’s image (Smith, 1975, 1:3).

CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION: A fundamental interpretive principle is that Scripture interprets Scripture. When other Scriptures about God’s nature are consulted, the Mormon understanding of Genesis 1:26–27 becomes impossible. John 4:24 indicates that God is spirit. Luke 24:39 tells us that a spirit does not have flesh and bones. Conclusion: Since God is spirit, he does not have flesh and bones. Moreover, contrary to Mormonism, God is not (and never has been) a man (Num. 23:19; Isa. 45:12; Hosea 11:9; Rom. 1:22–23)⁶

God’s image is not a physical or bodily thing:

- It’s true that the word “image” in the Bible can be and is used of something visible like an idol (ex: graven images) but there is a different Hebrew word *gillul* that would emphasize the physical shape of an idol
- The word “likeness” has a more abstract nuance than image, and it tones down the first

word and is probably added to make sure no one thinks man is an exact image of God. This same Hebrew word for “likeness” is used by Ezekiel in the early chapters of his prophecy repeatedly, where he never says that he saw God, but only the likeness of God or something associated with God or like God in some way.⁷

- The word “likeness” helps to avoid the implication that man is a precise copy of God, albeit in miniature.⁸ “Image” emphasizes man’s close similarity to God, while “likeness” stresses that this similarity is not exact.⁹
- Man’s physical body was made from the earth, the ground, as Genesis 2 explains, and was lifeless until the spirit of God breathed into His nostrils the breath of life, and then I believe is when He imparted the image of God to the man
- Physical images of God are consistently forbidden in O.T.

So we’ve seen that man in God’s image does not mean man is deity, nor does it mean God has a physical body or that our anatomy looks like him in some way. We are not God, He is not us

3. Thirdly, God’s image in man is not something that was erased or cancelled out when man fell into sin.

Some of the old writers seemed confused on this and a few argued that after Genesis 3, the image remained only partially or that likeness was completely lost – but Genesis 5 shows that man is still in God’s likeness and that it is passed on to children, and Genesis 9:6 makes clear that even sinful man is in God’s image.

Genesis 9:6 (NASB95)

6 “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

The New Testament also affirms this of all human beings, not just Christians:

James 3:9 *With it [our tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.*

So we’ve discussed what God’s image does NOT mean - what *does* it mean to be made in God’s image, in God’s likeness?

It’s always best to look at the context. One obvious fact in the context is that mankind is the first and only creature that the text says God made in God’s own image. Animals are created “according to their kind” whereas humans are created “according to the likeness of God”

This again supports the idea that God’s image does not have to do with our body or physicality, as there is much about us internally and externally that is biologically similar to some animals.

In the immediate context and wording of verse 26, we see man’s creation revealed differently with the personal pronouns God uses in creating man as opposed to other creatures (“us” and “our”).

1. RELATIONAL - PERSONHOOD

God reveals Himself in this text as a relational God, a personal God, a God who we saw last week has always been in an eternal relationship and communion and fellowship with the other persons that make up the Godhead – what we call the Trinity.

MacArthur writes:

But above all, the image of God can be summed up by the word *personhood*. We are *persons*. Our lives involve relationships. We are capable of fellowship. We are able to love other persons in a Godlike sense. We understand communion. We have an amazing capacity for language. We have conversations. We know what it is to share thoughts, convey and discern attitudes, give and take friendship, perceive a sense of brotherhood, communicate ideas, and participate in experiences with others. Animals cannot do those things in the same sense people can. That is why when God created man He immediately said that it was not good for man to be alone. The image of God is personhood, and personhood can function only in the context of relationships. Man's capacity for intimate personal relationships needed fulfillment. Most important, man was designed to have a personal relationship with God.¹⁰

Verse 27 also supports this when it says “male and female He created them” – no other of God's creatures are described this way, interestingly not even the angels, but man and woman are described this way.

‘Angels were not made male and female, for they were not to propagate their kind (Lu. 20:34–36); but man was made so, that the nature might be propagated and the race continued.’ (M. Henry)

Bruce Ware notes: ‘As is often observed, since this was written in a patriarchal cultural context, it is remarkable that the biblical writer chose to identify the female along with the male as of the exact same name and nature as “man.” Male and female are equal in essence and so equal in dignity, worth, and importance.’¹¹

Persons as opposed to animals are more deeply rational, they have deep self-awareness, they have a conscience, they have spiritual discernment, they have deep emotions, and a sense of morality.

2. RESEMBLANCE OF GOD'S NATURE

The difficulty of dissecting what is God's image, is some of these may be the *consequence* of God's image, rather than the *content*. The Hebrew word translated image (*tselem*) here means “resemblance” (*BDB*, p. 853). God the Father says to His Son and Spirit let us make man in our image, in our likeness, resembling us.

The Bible Background Commentary says ‘In the ancient world an image was believed to carry the essence of that which it represented.’¹²

In the text of Genesis 1, we have already seen in verse 2 that God has a Spirit, and we have seen that He thinks, speaks, wills, and acts and is creative in ways His other creatures are not. And humans are created by God also with a spirit, and thinking, speaking, willing, acting, and able to exercise creativity and reflect other characteristics of God. It says several times in this chapter that “God saw that it was good” and mankind is uniquely designed to see all that God made is good, mankind is upright and able to appreciate the wonders of the heavens that declare God’s glory.

Throughout this chapter God divides and separates things, and Moses is writing this chapter to Israelites in the wilderness who were being given God’s law with instructions to separate and divide, and to be set apart from the rest. Moses is also going to inform them that another way they are to resemble and pattern after God is in working hard and using the creative gifts they’re given for six days, but then resting on the seventh day to remember God.

“God is Spirit” and so the part of man that is in God’s image is the spiritual part. None of the animals are given spirits or souls that will live forever, only human beings.

Only mankind has a spirit, or more accurately, *is* a spirit. The real you is not your physical body, the house or tent you dwell in, the material part of you is just a temporary tabernacle, but the immaterial part of you is who you really are and what will continue when you die. A spirit can and does exist independently of the body (as Jesus said, “a spirit has not flesh and blood”) and biblical writers speak of leaving the body like they are departing from a house. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

I remember the first open casket funeral I ever attended, and seeing the body of Mary, my coworker, the vivid thought in my mind is that’s not really her, she’s gone, that’s just a body.

3. ROLE AND REPRESENTATIVE ON EARTH

Another meaning of the Hebrew word *image* “basically refers to a representation.”¹³ Image may include what we do, not just what we are. It may be a mistake to think of image only in the sense of invisible internal parts of man – the context of verses 26-28 seems to put emphasis on the role of man as God’s visible representative here on earth.

One writer asks us whether the fact that we are rational creatures with personality ‘could be a sufficient explanation for the murder prohibition in Genesis 9:6, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” Can we really believe that the basis for the prohibition of bloodshed lies in our being rational creatures, or our personality? ... Scripture does not say that God implanted his image inside of us, but that we *are* in his image ...

This is the only basis that I know of for affirming human dignity and worth. Humans do not have value based on their being rational creatures; for then the more rational or intellectual or witty a person was, the more value he or she would have. Humans do not have value based on their ability to will, to desire something, or to pursue goals; then the meek would have less value than tyrants. Human dignity comes not from any traits inside of ourselves, but from a role imposed upon us by our Creator at the time of our creation. As long as we exist, we will be in this role. All of the personality characteristics, which are so often debated in respect to the image

of God, are merely that: characteristics. But God did not make mankind with his image as one, or some, or all of our characteristics. God made humans expressly to *be* his image.

This is the one central and essential point that sets up the difference between us and the animals: they were not created to be the image of God; we were. This was Adam's role in the newly created universe and this is the role into which every one of Adam's descendants is born. We are the image and likeness, the picture, to which all of creation looks to see the invisible God Even more fundamentally, God is to be able to see his own glory reflected in us.'¹⁴ We are to represent God's rule over the earth. God who is revealed as the sovereign king in this chapter delegates authority to mankind who is to be His vice-regent, earthly representative and steward.

Verse 26 says "let them have dominion / rule" and it mentions various creatures here on earth. This word usually refers to human dominion, not divine rule (Ps. 110:2). Man has been given the highest place of rulership and responsibility to reflect God on earth.

God previously had named the day, and the night (v. 5), and he had named the expanse (v. 8), and the land he called earth (v. 10) – this showed His dominion over them. Then in 2:19-20 we read that God gives man the task of naming the animals, showing very clearly man's higher order and place in God's economy – it is not really the lion who is the king of the forest – man has the highest rank of God's earthly creatures.

Friends, the point here is not that we are so great, but that God is so great and so kind and so gracious. What is man? And who is this God who cares so much for this creature of clay and loves him so much? The problem with the self-worth and self-esteem movement is that it focuses on self rather than the all-satisfying all-sufficient God who is merciful to man and blesses us – not *because of* who we are, but *in spite of* who we are apart from His sovereign grace. When you understand who God is in Genesis 1, the glorious and holy Trinity who doesn't need anything, but chose to create us in love, and when you understand who man is, so small and seemingly insignificant in this vast universe of majesty and grandeur, reading this passage about the attention and care and blessing God gives to undeserving man should astonish you at the condescension of a matchless, magnificent, majestic God.

Psalm 8 (NASB95)

1 For the choir director; on the Gittith. A Psalm of David. O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!

2 From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;

4 What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?

5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!

6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,

7 All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field,

8 The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

9 O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth!

Apart from God, we are nothing and can do nothing. Genesis 2 teaches us we are just formed of the same clay and earthly material as any other creature, yet Psalm 8:5 says God crowns man with glory and majesty and lets him rule over the works of your hands. R.C. Sproul has an excellent teaching series called “from dust to glory” which really captures well this idea of God’s working in man.

It is only in this passage that we rightly understand the noble dignity and value of God’s image, and it is here that we should be astonished that this great and glorious God we’ve been learning about in Genesis 1, would stoop to take thought of us, and to care for us! We do not deserve it, but God’s glory and God’s name and God’s praise is deserving, as we saw last week.

O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

And of course the ultimate stooping down, coming down, the ultimate way God’s thought of us and care for us and love for us was manifested, was in sending His Son to this earth. Sinful mankind has fallen from his lofty estate and privileges and has not been treating God’s creation the way God commanded him to. Man who was created to reign in this world, but instead the forces of this world reign. Romans 5 tells us that sin and death have reigned since Adam (v. 14, 17, 21).

When Jesus Christ, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), came to earth, He exercised the dominion that the first Adam had lost. He demonstrated that He had authority over the fish (Luke 5:1–7; John 21:1–6; Matt. 17:24–27), the fowl (26:69–75), and the animals (Mark 1:13; 11:3–7). When He died on the cross, He conquered sin and death, so that now grace can reign (Rom. 5:21) and God’s people can “reign in life” through Jesus Christ (v. 17). One day, when He returns, Jesus will restore to His own the dominion that was lost because of Adam (Heb. 2:5ff). [Heb. 2 applies Psalm 8 ultimately to Jesus]¹⁵

To God be the glory, great things He has done, so loved He the world that He gave us His son

APPLICATION

1. Do not murder (Gen 9:6) or malign other humans (James 3:9)

Abortion is unthinkable – an unborn child is not mere tissue or a fetus or embryo that only becomes life when it exits the birth canal – scripture teaches that every unborn child has full personhood and is a human life created in God’s image, never to be murdered

Jesus warned about heart murder, not just physical murder – hatred

James says explicitly that to curse or verbally assault a fellow man is actually an assault on God Himself who made that man. This is true of Muslims and people who don’t look like us, you are also to restrain your speech and thoughts about the person who cut you off on the freeway, or the jerk who did something to you, or the person in your life who drives you crazy,

Matthew Henry writes: ‘God made but one male and one female, that all the nations of men might know themselves to be made of one blood, descendants from one common stock, and might thereby be induced to love one another.’

2. Recognize God is your owner and you are to render what is due Him (Matt 22:19-21)

19 “Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius.

20 And He said to them, “Whose **likeness** and inscription is this?”

21 They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

Isaiah 43:1-7 (NASB95)

1 But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!

2 “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you.

3 “For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place.

4 “Since you are precious in My sight, Since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life.

5 “Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, And gather you from the west.

6 “I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ And to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring My sons from afar And My daughters from the ends of the earth,

7 Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.”

May God help us to bear His image well and to live more for His glory.

¹ *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English ed., p. 379.

² Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (2002). *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (1:xii-39). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. The prepositions before both words “are also equally interchangeable, as we may see from a comparison of this verse with Gen. 5:1 and 3. (Compare also Lev. 6:4 with Lev. 27:12, and for the use of ל to denote a norm, or sample, Ex. 25:40; 30:32, 37, etc.)”

³ David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary*

⁴ Geisler, N. L., & Rhodes, R. (1997). *When cultists ask : A popular handbook on cultic misinterpretations* (22). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

⁵ Available at www.pbc.org/ray/series

⁶ Geisler, 22.

⁷ Victor Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, NICOT series, pp. 135-6.

⁸ TWOT, 192. ‘The less specific and more abstract *dēmût* was added. *dēmût* then defines and limits the meaning of *šel em’*

⁹ Elwell, W. A. (1996, c1989). *Vol. 3: Evangelical commentary on the Bible*. Baker reference library (Ge 1:24). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.

¹⁰ MacArthur, J. (2001). *The battle for the beginning : The Bible on creation and the fall of Adam* (163). Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group.

¹¹ Bruce Ware, “Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God,” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7:1 (Spring 2002), p. 18.

¹² Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary : Old*

Testament (electronic ed.) (Ge 1:31-2:3). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹³ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 757.

¹⁴ Douglas P. Baker, "The Image of God: According to their Kinds," *Reformation and Revival Journal* 12:2 (Spring 2003) p. 100-101.

¹⁵ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Basic*. Colorado Springs: CO: Chariot Victor Pub., p. 30.