

Humanity As The Image Of God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, for a wee while this morning, I'd like us to turn back to the passage that Neil read for us. I'm going to read again Genesis 1, 26 to 28, where it says, 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, 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, and in the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. Now, in our evening services, over the past few weeks, we've been doing a series called The Real Us, and in that series, we're looking at some of the key biblical teaching in relation to humanity.

And originally, I'd planned to do it in six parts, and we were looking at all these topics. But for those of you who manage along in the evening, you'll know that I've not been able to stick to my six parts, and we've had a few weeks looking at some of these topics, because in so many ways, there's so much that the Bible teaches us about ourselves.

But this is the basic framework of what we've been thinking about. We've been thinking about the creation of humanity, the nature of humanity, the purpose of humanity. And we've been working our way through that. And tonight, we're going to finish off thinking a little bit more about the purpose of humanity.

There was one wee bit last week that didn't quite finish, so we're going to look at that tonight. But all of that combines the nature of humanity, the purpose of humanity, all of that combines to bring us to the great topics that are being highlighted in parts four, five, and six.

[1 : 3 3] Humanity as the image of God. Humanity as male and female. Humanity as a blessed covenant creature. Humanity as a blessed covenant creature. And so this morning, I want us to look especially at what was originally going to be part four, humanity as the image of God.

Because in so many ways, this is a core biblical teaching about who we are. This is crucial if we're going to understand the real us.

So, we're going to think a little bit about the image of God this morning. And to do that, well, we're going to build what you would, like if you were sounding fancy, you would say we're going to build a systematic framework for understanding the image of God.

What that basically means is I'm going to show you a big complicated diagram. Now, I love diagrams and I hope that the diagram we're going to work through today will be helpful. And all of it's going to draw on several aspects, several texts from Scripture.

And the aim is to kind of capture some of the key things that the Bible teaches us about what it means for you and me to be created in the image of God. Now, we've been looking together at both the nature and the purpose of humanity.

[2 : 5 2] And one of the things that we've said several times in the evening services that we're going to pick up on today is that the nature and purpose of humanity is captured by this concept of being made in the image of God.

And so, we have to think about both of these things in relation to the image of God, our nature and our purpose. And this is raising a crucial point that I want us to start with.

And to help us capture this, I'm going to read a quotation from a theologian called Hermann Bavinck. He was a Dutch theologian. He lived just over 100 years ago. And he said this, In our treatment of the doctrine of the image of God, then we must highlight, in accordance with Scripture and the Reformed Confession, the idea that a human being does not bear or have the image of God, but that he or she is the image of God.

As a human being, a human, and when they use the word man, it's just meaning human, man is the son, the likeness, the offspring of God.

And so, the key thing there is to emphasize is that our nature is that we are the image of God. That's what it means. From the Bible's perspective, that's what it means to be a human.

[4 : 07] To be a human is to be the image of God. So, that's our nature. And from that nature comes our purpose. So, our nature is that we are the image of God.

Our purpose is to image him, to bear that image as his image. So, I've used this illustration before. If you imagine an old-fashioned phone, remember when we were wee, you had phones, and they weren't smart.

They were just plugged into the wall, and they had dials or buttons. And if you were to ask, you know, if you were to look at that thing, and maybe if some of the kids just now who had not seen an old-fashioned phone came in and they said, What is that?

You would say, It's a phone. And you would say, What does it do? It phones. And so, its nature and its purpose are tied together. So, as we introduce this, we're basically saying that the image of God is fundamental to the nature of humanity and the purpose of humanity.

So, what are you? You are the image of God. What are you for? You are to image God. So, what does that involve?

[5 : 15] Well, the passage we read from Genesis gives us two key terms that introduce us. It's the terms image and likeness. I hope you can see that up there. I made it a wee bit faded, but hopefully you'll see that.

You'll understand why that is as we go through our diagram. The two terms came from Genesis 127. Image and likeness. 126, rather.

And it's good to just unpack a little bit what these two words mean. So, the word image basically means the idea of cutting out something or carving out something.

So, that idea of cutting out. And in the Old Testament, that language is often used to actually cut and carve like a statue or even like an image, like an idol.

And actually, in the Old Testament, it is used for idols. The same word. So, all the people went to the house of Baal and tore it down. His altars and his images, they broke in pieces. So, the same word is used to imagine like a little statue, a little image that's been carved out in order to sort of be an image of a particular deity.

[6 : 27] And the whole point of that is that image, that carving, is to represent something else. So, this, what's being carved out as an idol of Baal, it would have been probably a piece of wood or something metal, carved out as a representation.

And that's the idea that lies behind this word. So, in the case of an idol, an idolatry, then you've got like a statue that's a representation of some supposed deity.

In the case of humanity, we have been carved out in such a way to represent God. So, that idea of representation is really important.

There's a certain sense in which, looking at all of us, we're seeing a representation of God. Alongside that is the word likeness.

And that's more the idea of basically resembling or being like something. And so, it's used in a couple of places here.

[7 : 35] I am like a desert owl in the wilderness. You see in Psalm 102, in Song of Solomon 2.9, my beloved is like a gazelle. So, same word, family is being used here, and it's being used here.

And so, likeness bears a resemblance of one another. We often see this from one generation to the next. You meet somebody, and we were watching football in town yesterday, and we were seeing the under-sixteens play, and we were chatting at the side, and we were saying, oh, he's so like his father, when you see them running and playing and things like that.

There's that resemblance, that likeness. We see it all the time. And so, in terms of our understanding of humanity from a biblical point of view, it's telling us that humanity carries a likeness of God.

There's crucial ways in which we are made like God. Crucial ways in which you are like God. And so, these two words together, image and likeness, capture this biblical teaching.

And here's another quotation from a theologian called Anthony Heuchma, who wrote a really good book on this. And he says, the two words together, image and likeness, tell us that man is a representation of God who is like God in certain respects.

[8 : 56] So, humanity, therefore, as the image of God, we represent him, we resemble him, and then to just add a third word to that, we also relate to him.

So, to be in the image of God, it speaks of we represent, we resemble, and all of that is in the context of our relationship to him.

Handwriting is awful, but that's what it's meant to say. Represent, resemble, relate. And so, let me just unpack those a little bit more. The idea of representation, really that's, in many ways, like an ambassadorial role.

So, to give you another quotation from that book by Heuchma, he says, As an ambassador is concerned to advance the best interests of his country, so man must seek to advance God's program for this world.

As God's representatives, we should support and defend what God stands for, and should promote what God promotes. And so, in that representative role, there's a loyalty towards God, there's an identity of the fact that we are his, and we are representing him.

[10 : 06] Alongside representing him, we resemble God. And so, as the image of God, we resemble our creator. So, that's just coming back to the fact that there's certain things about you and about me that are God-like.

And that's part of God's goodness, too, is he has gifted us with qualities and attributes that are like himself. And I heard this captured beautifully in a sermon by an American theologian called Ed Clowney.

And he said this that, you know, he says, I think I've said this before, but it's one of my favorite quotes. He said, you know, Psalm 19 says, The heavens declare the glory of God. So, if you want to see the glory of God, a glimpse of the glory of God, you have to stand outside in a dark, clear sky, and you see the amazing universe.

And so, if you want to see the glory of God, you look up at a starry night, and it's amazing. That's how you see a glimpse of the glory of God.

But if you want to see the image of God, you don't look at a star-filled universe. You look in the mirror. Because we are the ones, and it's only us, who bear that image, and who are that image.

[11 : 23] And this ties in with the second commandment. Ten commandments are given, and the second one says, You shall not make for yourself a carved image, same language, or any likeness of anything that's in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth.

And part of what's being said here is that God does not want to carve out a little statue to say, Oh, this is God. He does not want us to make an image of God, because He has already made the image of God Himself.

It's you and me. And so, God does not want His creatures to make images of Him, since He has created, He has already created an image of Himself.

A living, walking, talking image. And so it's reminding us that the idolatry that's prohibited in the second commandment, it's actually a double blasphemy. It's a blasphemy against God to make a statue of Him.

But it's also a blasphemy against humanity. A blasphemy against the image of God. Because we're the ones who've been made to be at His image. So we represent Him, we resemble Him, and we relate to Him.

[12 : 32] Humanity, as the image of God, is made to relate to God. And we've been saying this quite a lot in our evening services. Humanity is made to enjoy a beautiful relationship with God. And if that relationship's in place, we can enjoy a relationship with one another, with the created world around us, and with ourselves.

And of course, if the relationship with God gets damaged, everything else gets badly affected as well. The question arises, though, what exactly is that kind of relationship?

And many theologians have argued that one of the ways to sum this up is to say that the relationship between humanity and God is a relationship of sonship, of father to child.

Now, the term sonship, the emphasis there is not on boys as opposed to girls. The emphasis is there on the language of privilege and connection.

And so that relationship of child to father. And that's captured, I think, in the teaching of the Bible. Because when you look later on in Genesis, in chapter 5, it'll say, this is the generation of Adam.

[13 : 36] This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female, he created him. 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.

So the fatherhood from Adam to Seth is expressed in terms of likeness and image. And it's argued that the same pattern applies to God and to humanity.

There's that relationship of sonship. And it gets, I think, confirmed later in the New Testament when the genealogy in Luke 3 culminates by describing Adam, son of Adam, the son of God.

That connection with God as our father lies at the heart of what it means to be made in the image of God. And so as God's children, we serve him.

We love him. We relate to him and live for him. So let's throw all of that into our diagram. So we're looking at the nature and the purpose of humanity. That speaks of what we are and it speaks of what we do.

[14 : 42] And it's captured in these terms image and likeness. And those terms image and likeness are summed up in these four words beginning with are. We resemble God. We represent God. And we are relating to him.

So what we are in terms of our nature, we resemble him. What we do in terms of our purpose, we represent him. And all of that is in the context of a relationship with him.

And that relationship is one of sonship whereby we serve him. So sons who serve children, who serve male and female humanity as one all together.

Okay, so we're getting there, right? Let's add a bit more detail though. In thinking about this, theologians have often drawn a distinction between what they call the structures and the functional aspect of bearing God's image.

So in terms of God's image, there's a structural sense and a functional sense of how we understand that. So we can pop that onto a diagram. And sometimes the structures are thought of the broad sense and the functions are thought of as the narrow sense.

[15 : 51] Now, you might be thinking all this, what on earth does any of this mean? Well, I hope I can explain and I hope it'll make sense. By structures, what we mean is that we have certain characteristics, attributes and abilities that we possess.

And these resemble God and they can be used to serve him as his representative. So I'm going to give you seven examples of what I mean.

And hopefully as I give you the examples, it's going to make sense. So number one is the mind. So you have a structural capacity to think and to understand.

Okay. And that's something that God can do. It's something that we can do. Number two is a will. So you have the structural capacity to desire and to make choices.

And God is able to do that. We are able to do that as well. Number three is your conscience. That's the structural capacity to discern and to judge right from wrong.

[16 : 55] God is able to do that. God knows what is right and what's wrong. We are able to do that. Number four is taste. We have a structural capacity to delight and enjoy things.

And so taste, not just in terms of food, but anything in terms of aesthetic appreciation or understanding of beauty. God is able to do that. We are able to do that. Number five is speech.

We've got a structural capacity to communicate. That can be through spoken word, but it can also be through written word, etc. That we can communicate. We can speak. God can do that.

So can you. Number six is action. We've got a structural capacity to live and move, to engage in activity, to make things happen.

And even as part of that, we're able to create things ourselves. God can do that. We can do that. And number seven is relate, which captures what we've been saying, that we have the structural capacity to relate, to love, to trust, and to respond.

[17 : 56] And all of these things together are capturing a set of capacities that humans have that no other part of creation has. And so you might see aspects of this in other parts in the animal world, but nowhere near to the extent that we have.

So sheep don't do these things. I mean, they might do some things. They like to taste the grass. But you know what I mean. The rest of the creation does not do these things in the way that we can.

And that, we have to recognize that that's astonishing. That that is placing humanity in a separate category to anything else in all creation. And particularly important there, I think, are actually numbers three, four, and five.

That whole sense of right and wrong that we have, that nothing else has, is unique. The sense of taste that we have. Sheep don't build art galleries. We do.

Cows don't stand and look at the sunset. We do. That ability to appreciate beauty is something that only humans have. And speech, communication, all of that, that's all obvious.

[19 : 14] Together, these things are just capturing the uniqueness of humanity. And the fascinating thing is that these are things that we do all the time. That's actually the building blocks of day-to-day life.

This week, you're going to use your mind. You're going to exercise your will. Your conscience is going to be pricked. Taste is going to shape so much of what you do. You're going to communicate all the time. There's activities you want to do. And all of that's in the context of many, many relationships.

The building blocks of what makes our lives our lives are these structures that we have because we're made in the image of God. So, in other words, your image of God-ness is what enables you to do what you do this week.

Whatever it is that you're going to do. And that's why you can do it. And the rest of the created world can't. So, we've got structures. We also talk about functions.

Basically, what that means is that the structures that we have are to be put to a proper use. They're to function appropriately. And theologians have summarized these functions under three words.

[20 : 24] Knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. So, in the shorter catechism, there's the question, how did God create man? God created man, male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

And the reason that these three words are highlighted is because the New Testament makes specific connection between these three terms and the image of God. And you find that in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3.

Let me read these verses to you. But, that is not the way you learn Christ, assuming that you've heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus. To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, and this is important, but created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

So, the likeness of God involves righteousness and holiness, is what's been discerned from that verse. And similarly, Colossians 3, 9-10, Do not lie to one another, seeing you've put off the old self with its practices, put on the new self, and being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

And so, the structures that we have should function in a way that aligns with what God wants for us. So, he wants us to grow in knowledge of him.

[21 : 41] He wants us to conform to his righteous standards. And he wants us to mirror his holiness, to be holy because he is holy. And by functioning in these ways, we will represent and resemble God as we relate to him, as those who are made in his image.

And in all of this, we're contributing to what God wants, which is that humans will flourish. And so, knowledge is an area where we grow. Righteousness is a standard we maintain.

Holiness is an attribute we protect. And when these three all come together, it means that we will know what's true. And we will do what's right.

And we will preserve what's good. And all of those things is what enables humanity to flourish. So, we can add that into our diagram.

In terms of our structures, we have a mind, a will, a conscience, taste, speech, actions. We can relate. And these function as we glorify and enjoy God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

[22 : 51] And all of that combines to be those who relate to God as his image, as sons, as we serve him. And the whole thing starts to fit together.

Now, a couple of important things to emphasize. When we speak about being the image of God and all of what that diagram is trying to represent, theologians make the important point that imaging God involves the whole person, the whole of humanity, and the whole of the Trinity.

The whole person, the whole of humanity, and the whole of the Trinity. So, whole person. Another quotation from Herb and Bavinck. Nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God.

While all creatures display vestiges of God, only a human being is the image of God. And he is such totally in soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations.

Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is truly human. And is truly and essentially human because and to the extent that he is the image of God.

[23 : 56] That's so important because this is the Bible's position that to be a human is to be the image of God. That's what it means to be human. And anything in us that distorts the image of God, that contradicts the character of God, that rejects the command of God, it's not meant to be there.

It's not the real us. Because the whole person, what we really are, is to be the image of God. And that applies to soul and body.

So, you image God, you can see the image of God in the human soul. And you see that in the thinking and discerning, the impressions, the awareness, the observations, the judgments, the decisions, the desires, all the stuff that happens to us internally.

All the stuff that we're able to do in a non-physical way. Our soul demonstrates and reveals the image of God. But it also applies to the human body.

Now, that's not saying that God has a human body. God does not have a physical human body. But it is saying that in our bodies, we also contribute to this bearing of the image of God.

[25 : 07] And I've got a quotation that I find very helpful from a theologian called Wayne Grudem. Now, I'm sorry that I've got so many quotes today. But they're just helpful quotes, I hope. And I'm going to just read this one. It says, I thought that was really helpful because it's just reminding us that the physical things that our body enables us to do is all taking us back to these functions that God's given us, structures that God's given us to function in a way that honors him.

All of it means that nothing in humanity is excluded from God's image. It stretches as far as our humanity does. And it constitutes our humanness. So, whole human, whole person.

The image of God also applies to the whole of humanity. And so that's important because being the image of God applies to each individual, but it mustn't be understood individualistically.

Instead, being the image of God is only fully seen in the whole of humanity collectively. And you see that emphasized so clearly that immediately as God says, I'm creating you in my image, I'm creating you male and female.

There's that collectiveness both together as the image of God. And so our nature and purpose as the image of God is a collective nature and purpose.

[26 : 57] So that includes men and women. We'll look at that in a little bit more detail next week. It transcends race, class, culture, maturity. And that's reflected, and it's most beautiful, in the church that includes everyone.

All people are called into it. It means that every time you look at a human, you are never not looking at an image bearer. Every person we look at in any context, we see in the image of God.

And so it's the whole person, the whole of humanity, and the whole trinity. And so when we're thinking about the image of God, we must remember that all that God is, Father, Son, and Spirit, must be included.

And so it's in us, not actually in the trillions of stars, and not actually in the glorious creation around us, but in us, that there is a special and particular and beautiful imaging of God in all His glory and goodness.

And that makes you incredibly special. And I guess that if all of this, if that big diagram there, and everything that I've seen today, tells you anything, it needs to tell you that you're incredibly special.

[28 : 24] And I love the fact that the Bible does that. That on page one of the Bible, it tells you what you are worth. It tells you how important you are.

It tells you how precious you are. And there are a thousand, a thousand things in this world that are going to make you feel useless and inferior. There are a thousand experiences that are going to make you feel like a waste of space.

And there are going to be tons of things in your life that are going to knock your confidence and make you feel worthless. And you go to page one of the Bible, and it says, you're the image of God.

And that makes you so special and so precious. And so please remember that about yourself. But of course, we also need to remember that that's true about everybody else.

And the person who does your head in this week at work or in school, you have to remember, oh man, behind all that, I need to remember that they're an image bearer as well. So that's the structure, that's the diagram that sums up, I hope, how we are created in the image of God.

[29 : 33] But of course, we've not stayed like that. And this is summing up the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 3, things change. And so we have to ask, you know, where does that leave the image of God?

Do we still have it? Have we lost it? Has it been damaged? In what ways has it been damaged? And this is where it's helpful to maintain these distinctions between the structures and the functions when we think about the impact of sin.

When sin came into the world, it does not take away the structures that we have. We still have them. We still have a mind, a will, a conscience, taste, speech, actions.

We can still relate. But now, because of sin, these structures are misused, they're misdirected, and they're misapplied. And so we keep them, but their use has become distorted.

And that's why this is a dotted line along here. The result of that, though, is that we no longer function the way we're made to.

[30 : 44] So instead of having knowledge, we're ignorant. We don't know stuff. We don't understand stuff. And we make the wrong decisions. Instead of righteousness, there's disobedience. We're tempted by things that are wrong, and we succumb to that temptation.

And instead of holiness, there's corruption. And so, function has fallen. And so instead of glorifying and enjoying God, we dishonor him and dismiss him in ignorance, disobedience, and corruption.

And that's why that's a solid line, because that's like a switch. Sin has broken that functioning and left us badly damaged.

So in the fall, the structural sense stays, the functional sense is broken, broken, and that is what makes us sinners.

And it's so important to recognize that, is that the reason why sin is so serious, it's not just that we're doing things that are wrong, thinking the wrong things, saying the wrong things, doing the wrong things, it's that we are using all of that to do it.

[31 : 53] So all the God-like qualities that we've been given, we've actually turned, turned on their heads, and turned against him.

What makes sin so serious is precisely the fact that man is now using God-given and God-imaging powers and gifts to do the things that are an affront to God.

And all of this is what needs to be fixed. In the process of redemption, God, by his spirit, renews the image in fallen human beings that enables them once again to use their God-reflecting gifts in a way as to image God properly.

Now, that leaves us with a super complicated diagram, which is what I promised you at the start of the service. What I want, what I hope this shows you, and what I hope I can persuade you of, is that what you're seeing on the screen there and the biblical teaching about the image of God, that is what makes sense of all of our experiences.

Because that diagram is complex because we are complicated. And let me ask you this question, what has been your experience of other people in your life? What's been your experience of other people?

[33 : 09] I think there's two answers. Your experience of other people has been amazing and awful. Other people in your life will have given you the highest joys of your life and they will have given you the biggest bruises of your life.

That's why. We're beautiful and broken. And what's your experience of yourself? Sometimes you find yourself so frustrating and so disappointing and so perplexing.

And yet at the same time, at the same time, you know that there's something special about you. And you long to be loved and cared for because you know that deep down that's the thirst of all our hearts.

there's something deeply special about every single one of us. And all of this, I hope, is helping you to see that the Bible makes sense of us.

The Bible shows us what the real us was made to be, but it now shows also what the ruined us has become. But the most amazing thing of all is that in the rest of the Bible, it could so easily be the case that this line just gets thicker and thicker and thicker and thicker and thicker and our relationship with God becomes more and more and more and more and more broken.

[34 : 51] But that's not how God leaves us. Instead, He comes to reach us in His Son and to restore us to what we were made to be. And I hope that every single one of us will just look to Him and learn more about that and follow Him.

Amen. Let's pray.