

PART 5: THE CREATION OF MAN

Have you ever noticed how some children like to know what their toys are made of? They may ask a lot of questions but sooner or later they will end up taking their toys apart in order to find out what makes them tick. Many of us have the same curiosity about ourselves. Why were we created? What is the purpose of our existence? Many of us cry out, sometimes in wonder and sometimes in despair, “Why am I like this?” Questions like this lead the psalmist to ask: *What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? (Ps 8:4)*

The mystery of our existence and our place in the universe has intrigued philosophers through the centuries and nearly all of the rest of humanity as well. Most of us at one time or another have pondered such questions as what we are, why we are, who we are, and what is our purpose for living? The questions can become especially poignant when the pressures, pain, and sorrows of life seem to rob us of any significance and reason for continuing.

The understanding of who we are is closely related to our understanding of God, for without true knowledge of God, we cannot have true knowledge of ourselves.

As John Calvin points out: “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.... It is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge

until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.” (*The Institutes of Christian Religion*)

To begin answering the questions of our meaning and purpose, we have to start at the beginning of creation as recorded in the book of Genesis. The writer unfolds the narrative by chronicling six successive steps to God’s created order, which starts with the formation of light followed by sky and water, then land and vegetation, then the heavenly bodies, the creation of fish and fowl and finally animals, with mankind being the last and crowning act.

*God said: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen 1:26-28)*

Here we see something unique about man that separates him from the rest of creation: that out of all of God’s creation, humankind alone reflects the image of God.

Now there has been much debate over the words “image” and “likeness” as to what exactly they mean and what bearing it has on our lives.

While varying explanations have been offered, it is usually agreed that bearing the image of God means we have qualities such as the ability to think, the ability to engage in moral reasoning, the ability of will to make ethical choices based on that reasoning, and we possess a spiritual nature that desires to worship God and have fellowship with Him.

First and foremost man is not only a physical being with flesh and bones but a spiritual, immaterial being with an inherited ability to know and commune with God his creator, worship Him, and in some mysterious way be joined with Him by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit.

Man was also created to be rational with the faculty of logical thought that separates him from the rest of the animal kingdom. This gift for intellectual reason also comprises an emotional capacity that allows him express a wide range of emotions ranging from love, to sorrow, and to anger.

In addition to being spiritual and having reason, the image of God carries a moral responsibility to reflect God in righteousness and holiness which the apostle Paul spoke of when he wrote: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Rom 12:1)*

Our moral ability and obligation to make ethical decisions is centered on God's revelation of what is right and wrong and includes a future judgment of reward or punishment based on the decisions we make. Paul warned: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. (2 Cor 5:10-11)*. We know that those born anew of God have passed from judgment in the sense that they are now declared righteous before God, no longer condemned for their sins, and kept by the Holy Spirit from falling away from God. Nevertheless, as the words of Paul imply, there are still consequences for what we do once we are saved.

When God created humankind He also blessed them saying: *"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."* (Gen 1:28)

Here we see that man was endowed with rulership over the earth and all its animals, which was specifically spelled out when God commanded man to care and look after the Garden of Eden: *Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. (Gen 2:1)*

Recognizing Man's authority Bruce Milne writes: "At creation humankind was invested by God with a special dignity, appointed ruler of the world under God, summoned to possess and subject it and to rule other creatures (Gn. 1:27-2-3, cf. Ps.8:5f.). Our present fallenness must not blind us to our original exaltation and dignity." (Know the Truth).

It must be kept in mind that this endowment of dominion was not an act that gave man complete authority or sovereignty over creation or his life. Man was created to practice stewardship over the earth under the authority and oversight of God. While man functions with a great deal of freedom at present, he has never lived in complete independence from his Creator or had total control over his environment. Man is a creature—"created" by God and is, therefore, totally dependent upon his creator and will remain so for eternity, for as Paul said: *in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)*

This image and likeness of God is also expressed in the manifestation of two distinct genders of male and female.

*And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every*

*beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said:*

*"This is now bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh;  
She shall be called Woman,  
Because she was taken out of Man."*

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (Gen 2:18-25)*

The duality of the sexes is a great blessing from God because it gives us companionship and help with someone who possesses a different but complimentary sexual nature. Moreover, we are blessed with a union of the two sexes confined within the bond and covenant of marriage with the inherited ability to propagate offspring in our likeness.

The creation of the sexes, male and female, does not imply in any way that one sex is better or of more worth and value than the other. Both are equally in the

image of God and delegated with the blessing of authority and dominion over earth. It is unfortunate that the introduction of sin brought a disruption into the harmony between the man and woman with a misunderstanding and misuse of the principles of leadership, submission, authority and the expression of love and sacrifice between the sexes. For married couples, it is a part of their Christian walk to do all they can in their relationships to heal what sin has harmed in this area.

One of the questions most asked about our creation is why God made man in the first place? We can begin by saying it was definitely not because God was lonely. God is absolutely self-sufficient. He needs no one to make His life complete. Within the trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit there is a perfect relationship, a perfect fellowship and a full expression of perfect love. Jesus said in John 17:5: *And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

And again Jesus declared: *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*  
(John 17:24-26)

Neither was it because God needed man's help. In Psalm 50 God reminded the people of His greatness and self-sufficiency when He spoke saying: *"Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I am God, your God! ...For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness. (Ps 50:7-12)*

Paul also acknowledged God's independence when he said: *Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.( Acts 17:25)*

Scripture states that man was created simply because of God's good pleasure to do so that we might know Him, fellowship with Him, love Him, worship Him and glorify Him for His own glory.

*Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him." (Isa 43:7)*

*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3-4)*

Although we have only touched on the meaning of our lives in the briefest possible way, we hope that we have made it clear that the foundation of our purpose—the very meaning of our existence—is to express God’s image in holiness, to worship and fellowship with Him in truth and faith, and to fulfill the blessing of authority and dominion of this earth for His glory with love for Him, our fellow mate and each other.

The sum of this can be found in Jesus’ statement regarding the true meaning of the Law when He was proposed the question “*which is the first command of all*” to which He answered: “*The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.*” (Mark 12:29-31)

As the Westminster Larger Catechism asks in its first question: What is the chief and highest end of man?

Answer: Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.

Over the past few centuries the biblical origins of man have been challenged with a more Darwinian evolutionist theory that no longer sees man as a special

created being but simply part and product of the natural evolutionary forces that govern the universe, and finds his beginning not at the hands of God but from a primordial pool of protein.

While it is beyond this study to discuss the dispute between those who believe in evolution and those who believe in a non-evolutionary creation by God, it is our purpose here simply to state that the value of man and the true importance of his life lies within the creation story and not a view that reduces the creation of the human race to an atheistic, materialistic model.

Any teaching on evolution that relies on the impersonal forces of matter, energy, time and chance to explain the universe and the human race gives no real foundation for our value and purpose. Without God and the creation of man in His image there are no real objective bases for morality other than a subjective, relative, self-imposed one.

Because we are made in God's image, with His blessing and purposes built into our very nature, we have a significance and reason for our lives that is not to be taken lightly. Not only do we have a true basis for morality that cannot be found in any other philosophy, including atheism, we have a reason to go on no matter our circumstances. We know why we exist. We know what sort of story we are in, for we are living in His story, and we know how the story is going to end: with a glorious union with God and fellowship with all the saints who have ever existed.

