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## WHY GOD CREATED PEOPLE

Genesis 1:26-31

By

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Genesis Lesson 4

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A couple of years ago a guy who was burned out from riding his bike across the country stopped at the church and gave me his bike, including everything on it--a backpack tent, saddlebags, and a number of bike tools. Included among the tools were a couple of gizmos that I had no idea what they were for. Since then, Daniel and I have figured out what one of them does, but the purpose for the other one still eludes us. Tools that you don't know the purpose for are of no use.

More important than knowing the purpose for tools is knowing the purpose for your life. Why did God create human beings? What is the reason God has put us on this planet? Sometimes we may feel like the man who said, "I've got a clock that tells me when to get up--but some days I need one to tell me why." It is not surprising that Genesis, the book of origins, tells us early on why God created people.

To understand our text, we need to understand the sweep of God's purpose as revealed throughout the Scriptures. Behind God's purpose in creating man is His conflict with Satan and the fallen angels. Before he fell into sin, Satan "had the seal of perfection," and was "in Eden, the garden of God." (The only biblical hints of Satan's fall are in Isa. 14:12-15 & Ezek. 28:12-16.) It is possible that Satan, before his fall, ruled an earlier earth under God. When he rebelled and led a number of angelic forces with him, God brought a judgment on that original creation, resulting in the chaos, emptiness, and darkness of Genesis 1:2 (the "gap theory"). In the recreated earth, God's purpose is to have man on earth reflecting His image and having dominion over the earth under His sovereignty. Even if you do not accept the "gap theory," it is clear that God put man on the earth to reflect His image and to rule over the creation (Gen. 1:26, 28).

But to whom was man to reflect God's image? There wasn't anybody except Adam and Eve. Once others were born, people

could reflect God's image to one another, thus glorifying God. But that isn't the full picture. The more complete answer is, the man and woman were to reflect God's image to the angelic hosts, both good and evil. God put man here to have dominion in place of Satan. The earth is the theater for God's ultimate victory over Satan and the fallen angels. Satan wants to defy God by ruling the earth. So he came to the first couple and tempted them to follow him in rebellion against God. When they fell into sin, God's purpose for the earth was temporarily thwarted as Adam and Eve came under Satan's rule. Thus, for the present Satan is recognized as the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30). But God regained dominion through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 12:31; Eph. 1:19-23).

But how does Christ exercise His dominion? One day He will return and rule the earth, but for now He is not physically present on the earth. In Ephesians Paul reveals that Christ's dominion is to be exercised and God's image is to be reflected through the church and through the unit of the church, the home. There are a number of parallels between Genesis and Ephesians. Adam is a type of Christ; Eve is a type of the church. Just as Eve was taken from Adam in his sleep and given to him after he awoke as his bride, a part of his body (Gen. 2:18-24), so the Church was brought forth as a result of Christ's death and resurrection, given to Him as His bride and body (Eph. 5:25-27; 1:19-23). Together, as male and female (Gen. 1:27), the first man was to reflect God's image. The church is the corporate "new man," Head and body, Bridegroom and Bride, created in God's image to have dominion over Satan (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:15-16; 4:24; 5:32; 6:10-20; Col. 3:10). Thus it is through the church (and its unit, the home) that Christ is regaining that which was lost in the fall.

Note Ephesians 3:9-12. Paul is explaining his ministry in light of God's eternal purpose. In verse 9 he refers to "God, who created all things." Why does Paul bring in the creation at this juncture? Because he is talking about God's purpose in creation, namely, to have a corporate man on earth reflecting His image and exercising dominion. Christ and the church are that new creation. The manifold wisdom of God is now to be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places in accordance with God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-11; 6:10-18).

The home, as the unit of the church, is also to have a part in God's purpose for the earth, since the marriage relationship is an earthly picture of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33). As a husband and wife live together in unity in the context of their proper roles (male and female, equal and yet distinct; equal and yet in proper headship and submission), their home becomes an outpost of God's rule. Thus marriage fits into God's purpose for the earth, that of defeating Satan and his forces. There will be no marriage in heaven (Matt. 22:29-30), when Satan will be cast into the lake of fire. With that as a theological and biblical background, let's go to Genesis 1:26-31 and see why God created people, namely, ...

God created people to reflect His image, to rule over creation, and to reproduce godly offspring.

### 1. God created people to reflect His image.

The first thing that strikes us is the repetition of the plural pronouns in reference to God: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (1:26). Jewish scholars usually explain this as God talking to the angels. But Scripture is clear that God did not take counsel with the angels when He created man (Isa. 40:12-26; 44:24), and besides, He didn't create man in the image of Himself along with the angels. While it would go too far to say that the plural pronoun teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, it is correct to say that it allows for the later revelation of that doctrine. We have here a consultation among the persons of the Godhead prior to the creation of man. There is one God, but He exists in three eternal, co-equal Persons, the same in substance, but distinct in subsistence. That sounds paradoxical, and it is impossible for our finite minds to grasp. But it is the clear revelation of Scripture. Man in God's image is one ("him") and yet is plural ("male and female").

Second, note that it is affirmed three times over (1:27) that God created man, twice emphasizing "in His image." There is no room for harmonizing the Genesis account with an evolutionary origin of man. God created man distinct from animals. Only man is made in God's image.

What does it mean that man is made in God's image and likeness? I take the two words as synonymous, used in combined form

to add either intensity or clarification. While theologians debate the precise meaning of the image of God in man, I think the essential feature is that man (as male and female) is able to reflect "God-likeness." Obviously, finite human beings, even before the fall, cannot reflect completely or accurately the eternal, infinite nature of God. But with his personality, intelligence, and ability to know and relate to God, man is able to reflect God-likeness in a limited way.

Two texts dealing with God's creation of the new man help us understand what this means. In Ephesians 4:24, Paul says that the believer has put on "the new man [lit.], which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." In Colossians 3:10, he states that we have put on "the new man [lit.] who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." Thus righteousness, holiness, truth, and the knowledge of God are included in what it means to be created in the image of God.

Also, part of the divine image involves the submission of the Son to the Father in the context of equality. The Father and the Son are equal in personhood, both possessing all the attributes of deity. But in order to carry out the divine purpose, the Son voluntarily submitted to the Father. In a similar way, the submission of the wife to the husband and of women in the church to male leadership, all in the context of being equal in personhood and standing before God, is bound up with man (as male and female) created in the divine image. Being created in God's image is, therefore, not only an individual matter, but a corporate one. It involves how we relate to one another as husband and wife in marriage, and as men and women in the local church. It is no accident that the roles of men and women are under strong attack in our day.

While the image of God in man was tarnished by the fall, it was not eradicated. While unredeemed men and women are not able to reflect the divine image to the same degree as those who are being conformed to the image of His Son through sanctification (Rom. 8:29), there is even in fallen man a vestige of the divine image. Thus God later ordained capital punishment for murder, because men are made in God's image (Gen. 9:6; see also, James 3:9). This image in fallen man includes the aspects of personality, intel-

lect, moral responsibility, and consciousness of God. Although unredeemed men are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), each person possesses a spirit (1 Cor. 2:11) which, when regenerated, is capable of communion with God, who is Spirit (John 4:24).

The fact that human beings have been created in God's image has many practical implications. The first is, unless you are rightly related to the Creator, your life has no lasting purpose. You are born, grow up, live a few years trying to make a comfortable existence, but your body too soon grows old and you die (assuming you don't die sooner)! What's the point of it? But if you know the eternal God through the Lord Jesus Christ who revealed Him to us and who, by His death and resurrection, opened the way for us to be forgiven and to have fellowship with our Creator, both now and for all eternity, then your life has purpose and meaning beyond the grave. In the well-known words of Augustine, "Thou hast created us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee!"

That every human, male and female, is created in God's image also means that human life is valuable and every person must be treated with respect. The unborn baby is not to be killed because it is not convenient to have a child, or because the parents prefer having a boy instead of a girl. Even if that child is deformed or mentally deficient, it is still human life, valuable in God's sight. At the other end of life, the elderly, even those who can no longer think clearly, must be treated with dignity and care. Abortion and euthanasia cheapen the value of human life. This doctrine also is the basis for treating women with the same respect granted to men, because the text is clear that the female, as well as the male, is created in the divine image.

The fact that those in Christ have "put on the new man, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:24), means that we must be committed to growing in godliness. We are to reflect God's image in every aspect and area of our lives, especially in our families. Much more could be said, but we must move on. Stemming from the fact that God made man in His image is a second purpose:

2. God created people to rule over creation.

“Let them rule” (1:26) is the consequence of “Let Us make man in Our image.” God gave the right of dominion over all living things to man. The command to subdue it (1:28) implies that there was work involved, even in the perfect setting of the Garden, to bring the creation under man’s rightful dominion. This dominion involves a stewardship of the earth and its resources under the sovereignty of God.

Fallen man has gone in two directions when it comes to the earth and its resources. Either he has tended to spoil the creation, through pollution and other forms of wanton disregard; or he has been ruled by creation, through false worship of nature. The two extremes exist in our society: some want to rape the land for their own profit or enjoyment; and others hold a reverential awe for nature, making man subservient even to the animals. Neither extreme is in biblical balance.

Apparently in the original creation, both man and beasts were vegetarian (1:29-30; although Calvin and others question this). Isaiah prophesies (11:6-8; 65:25) that in the millennial kingdom, when the world is under the reign of Christ, animals will not prey upon other animals, but that the bear and lion will graze like cows, thus restoring creation to its state before the fall. After the Flood God gave explicit permission for men to eat meat, as long as they did not eat the blood (Gen. 9:3-4).

Does that mean that it’s more spiritual to be a vegetarian? Before you jump to that conclusion, remember that the Lord and two angels ate beef when they visited Abraham (Gen. 18:7-8). God ordained for the priests, for whom personal holiness was essential, to eat part of the sacrifices (1 Cor. 9:13). Jesus ate roasted lamb (the Passover, Luke 22:15) as well as broiled fish (after the resurrection, Luke 24:42-43). So while you are free not to eat meat for dietary reasons if you so choose, you are not more sanctified by abstaining.

Man ruled creation before the fall. But when Satan got man to obey him, then Satan became the ruler of this world. For man to regain his rightful place of dominion over this world, he must exercise dominion not only over the material world, but also over the spiritual forces of darkness (Eph. 6:10-20). This can only be gained by becoming a member of the body of Christ, the Head, who through His resurrection has been elevated to the place of dominion.

ion over all things (Eph. 1:19-23). And so a major part of our purpose as the church, is to exercise dominion for Christ over Satan and his forces through spiritual warfare.

The practical implication of our ruling over creation is that we must put on the full armor of God and, especially, become people of prayer (Eph. 6:13-17, esp. 18-19). When Peter talks of the roles of husband and wife in marriage, he tells the husband to grant his wife honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, and then adds, "so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7). Thus both in the church and in our homes we are to rule over all creation, but especially over the spiritual forces of darkness, under the authority of Christ through prayer.

So God put us on this earth to reflect His image and to rule over creation. There's a third reason indicated in our text:

3. God created people to reproduce godly offspring.

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it" (1:28). This is both God's pronouncement of blessing as well as His delegation of responsibility. The blessing of sharing in God's creative process by producing offspring was given to other living things besides man (1:22, 24-25). But man alone was commanded not only to fill the earth, but also to subdue it. This requires not only bearing children, but rearing godly children who will properly subdue the earth under God. By producing ungodly children man fills, but does not subdue, the earth.

How should we apply this verse today? Roman Catholics, of course, have taken it to mean that birth control is wrong and that the major purpose of marriage is to bear children. But also many Protestants advocate not practicing any form of artificial birth control and having as many children as possible. But we need to be careful to apply the verse correctly.

Clearly, the text does not mean that every person must get married and have children to fulfill God's purpose. Neither Jesus nor the apostle Paul would have qualified if it means that. But it does mean that children are to be viewed as blessings from God. That needs to be said in our day when many couples choose not to have children so they can selfishly pursue their careers and materialistic lifestyles. While I believe that there is a biblical case for using



means to prevent conception within Christian marriage, there are right and wrong reasons for using such means. Selfishness is never a proper motive. Our children are one of the greatest blessings and biggest responsibilities God entrusts to us. We need to take the time and effort to see each child come to know Christ and to be trained in His ways.

But I believe that there also is a spiritual application of Genesis 1:28: To reproduce godly offspring means that we all must be involved in the work of evangelism. To fill the earth and subdue it means that we've got to subdue the ruler of the earth, Satan, by rescuing people from his domain of darkness and seeing them transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13). People cannot reflect God's image, rule over His creation, and reproduce godly offspring unless they live under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews makes this spiritual application when he attributes to Christ the words, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me" (Heb. 2:13). One of God's greatest blessings is when He gives you spiritual children, fruit that remains through all eternity!

As I wrote in the last newsletter, evangelism is not my gift. I struggle with doing it as much as any of you do. But we need to put on the front burner the fact that part of our purpose for being on this earth is to reproduce godly offspring, not just with our own children, but also by bearing witness of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that others will come to know their Creator and their purpose for being here.

### Conclusion

A man died and they put on his tombstone: "He came, stayed a while, and left." Sad epitaph! But what if it had said, "He came, stayed a while, got married, worked at his job, raised a family, and left"? Throw in, "He became a success in his career and made a pile of money." It's still missing the purpose for which God created us.

God made us individually, and as male and female in our marriages, and corporately as His church, *to reflect His image* by being godly people. He made us to *rule over His creation* as responsible stewards of the earth, and to rule over the ruler of this fallen world

as we exercise the authority of Christ our Head through prayer. He made us to *reproduce godly offspring*, both in our families and in our church family through bearing spiritual children.

That's why God created people. That's why He created you-- to know and grow to be like the One in whose image you were created; to reign with Him; and, to be used by Him in His kingdom. You will be restless, confused, or lacking in fulfillment until you begin living in line with God's purpose for creating you.

### Discussion Questions

1. Does our being created in the image of God provide a biblical basis for "self-esteem"? Why/why not?
2. If someone argued that seriously deformed babies are not made in God's image, how would you answer? What Scriptures apply?
3. To what extent are spiritual forces behind everyday events? Should we attribute problems to demonic influence?
4. Some Christians think that all artificial means of birth control are wrong. Agree/disagree? Support your position biblically.

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