

# IV. THE CREATOR AND HIS CREATION

## CREATION OF AN EDENIC PARADISE AND THE IMAGE BEARERS OF GOD

Now that we know that we have been given an incredible gift in the form of God's revealed thoughts, mind, desires, and will through His Word, we get to begin this great and awesome journey as we seek Him out and get to know Him. Through His revealed Logos, we will begin to understand not only who He is, but who we are, and what God's ultimate desire for His creation is.

We must always keep in mind that this journey is one that is lifelong, after all we have to remember that God is infinite, and we will never, ever, even in eternity future, completely uncover all the great truths and mysteries of God. We will, however, enjoy each new layer of intimate knowledge He reveals to us as we pursue Him with all we have. With this in mind, let's start from the beginning, or at least, the beginning of creation.

### ☪ GOD AS CREATOR ☪

When opening up to page one of the Bible, we find that God has wonderfully chosen to give us a beautiful first impression of who He is: the Creator. When you sit back and consider this for a minute, it should strike you as beautiful and, I have to say, a little disarming. Of all the pictures and feelings we and our culture have had of God throughout the years, sometimes we forget that He is, first and foremost, as far as His revealed actions go, a Creator.

Picture a sculptor, a painter, or a musician considering and planning his creation; an artist contemplating the look, design, feel, purpose, approach, and ultimate goal for his masterpiece. The love and care, the passion and intimacy; the tedious thought and particularity that a truly great artist considers as he approaches his work.

I've been accused *countless* times for being very meticulous with many things in my life.<sup>205</sup> As a musician, artist, father, friend, student, pastor, baseball fan, Irish American, and overall just lover of life, I constantly find myself wanting to have everything be something special, with special meaning, purpose, and reason. I don't do many things arbitrarily, but rather with great specificity, oftentimes even to the (usually) playful ridicule of friends and family.

Maybe you're like me, or maybe you know someone who is; very sentimental, and a hopeless romantic. I say this because I want us to get a picture of the incredibly purposeful, meaningful, thoughtful, and perfect creative mind of our Creator. God, as Creator, didn't just "throw a little something together." He didn't create out of boredom or create arbitrarily or randomly. But His creation is something that He made with particularity, love, thought, and meaning.

In **Genesis 1** and **2** we see that God didn't build something out of raw material, but He created something out of nothing. This is a concept we call *ex nihilo*, ♣ which is Latin for "out of nothing." Look at the first two verses of **Genesis 1**:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.<sup>2</sup> The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.



It says that the earth was "formless and empty," or as some translations say "without form and void." I remember as a kid growing up watching *the Neverending Story*, which was a movie about a fantasy world's existence being dependent on the creative imagination of a human child. Without that creative interest and interaction from the child's desires and mind, a force called "the Nothing" would obliterate it. One of the characters, Atreyu, declares to another character, a giant turtle named Morla the Ancient One, that "we're all going to die!" because of the oncoming threat of the Nothing. Morla then responds "Well, at least that would be *something*."

As silly of an analogy as it might be, it somehow causes me to consider the depth of what "nothing" really is; that before God decided as a creative, particular, artistic, loving, and purposeful artist to create all that we know, there simply was "nothing." Not even non-existence, because non-existence "at least would be *something*."

<sup>205</sup> In trying to find an accurate word to describe myself, I asked my friends. The varying words were particular, obsessive, purposeful, nostalgic, detailed, thoughtful, and ridiculous. Some of those friends I like more than others.

**Revelation 4.11** speaks specifically in saying that God “created all things, and by [His] will they existed and were created.” Not only does it affirm that God created “all things,” but that the very way that they came into existence was due to His will; His own desire as the Creator. Later in **Acts 17.24, 25** the Paul says that “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”

These verses specifically state that indeed “all things” were made by God and that it was His will, plan, and purpose. The existence of life is not an arbitrary occurrence or mess. The best artists, creators, musicians, athletes, and writers have a plan and purpose. The universe was not a science experiment gone wrong or a coincidence of incredible perfect outcome. Without the existence of an all-powerful creative God, it is impossible for “nothing” to become “something.” It could only be through the intentional mind and desire of a creative God.<sup>206</sup>

## GOD'S WORD AMIDST CREATION

All throughout the Word, in addition to these verses, we see other references to this great picture of God’s creativity and ability to form everything out of nothing. **Psalm 33.6-11** is one of my favorites as it speaks of His creative power and works, but it also reveals His *ongoing* purposeful and planned creativity as He interacts with His creation, and more importantly, *how* He does it:

<sup>6</sup> By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

<sup>7</sup> He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses.

<sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

<sup>9</sup> For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

<sup>11</sup> The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

Did you catch that? Here the psalmist agrees with **Genesis 1.1, 2**, not only to creation being by God’s power and unction, but by the very *method* by which creation is created: God’s Word. Again, we see that God’s Word is not an exterior “add on” to who God is, but it is intrinsically one with who God is. God’s Word embodies His very power to create something from nothing. God’s Word spoke into existence all that we know. In **Genesis** it states that “God *said* [spoke His Word with His mouth], “Let there be light...an expanse...water...dry ground...etc.” And then the Bible says “and it was so.”

Also, we see in **Hebrews 11.3** that “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

God’s Word, indeed, is living and powerful, and it is, as we have seen, not just words to describe His desires or thoughts, but that His Word (Logos) is indeed His mind, desires, thoughts, and creativity manifest as authoritative verbalization. Consider this for a second:

**God’s Word created everything out of nothing.**

**Now take a look at your Bible. Do you believe the promises that it contains?**

**Do you believe it has the power that it claims to change your heart?**

Do you believe that it can change your heart and make you to be more like Jesus? Do you believe that it can sanctify you, eradicate your sin, and make you the disciple that you pray to be? Do you believe in the power of the Logos of God? Do you believe the promises it has for you and your future? The sobriety amid this truth about His Word should be a profound one for us. We have been given the very authoritative, creative, majestic Word of God!

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<sup>206</sup> The study of evidence and facts that explore topics like this is called “apologetics.” If you are interested in this, check out some of the resources at the end of this chapter.

## THE TRINITY IN CREATION

Noticing God's Word as an integral part of creation brings up another important note. As we saw in the section on God's Word, Jesus Christ Himself is the Word made flesh. We have already looked at **John 1.1-5, 14** in that chapter, but it would do us well to consider it again:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Additionally, we see that **1 Corinthians 8.6** says that there is "one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." In speaking of Jesus, we see the New Testament also speak of His role in creation in these verses:

### **Colossians 1.15-20**

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

### **Hebrews 1.1-4**

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

A few things about the various works of the Trinity you may have noticed about these verses:

- First, that **Colossians** speaks specifically that everything was created not just by Christ, but *for Him*. Again, we see *intimate purpose* in God's desire to create *all things through His Son*.
- Also, we see again, this *incredible* display of Jesus' *powerful Word* being what not only has created all things in the universe, but the very thing that *sustains* them. God did not just "get the ball rolling" and watch from a distance, that is a heresy called *deism* ♣ (as if God started the domino effect and sits back), but He is intimately involved in the sustaining of all things.
- We also see the Holy Spirit's intimate involvement in creation. As we look again in **Genesis 1.2**, we see that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters," showing a very specific role that the Spirit had in the creation, a role that appears to be in some ways an application and sustaining of the decree that God was making by sending forth His Word to create. Likewise, in **Job 33.4**, Job mentions that "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."
- Also in **Psalms 104.30** it says, in speaking of creation, "When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground."<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>207</sup>In other parts of the Bible, it speaks of the "breath of God" or "wind of God," which aren't *explicitly* speaking of the Spirit, but the word used for "wind," "breath," and "Spirit" are all the same, and it would seem very probably that it is at very least *implicitly* showing these verses as figuratively speaking of the very work of the Spirit. Interestingly, even in **Job 27.3**, Job declares he will keep his testimony "as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils." But here he uses the more broad word for breath, *naphesh*, where the word here is translated "life," and then uses a different word for breath, the word commonly used interchangeably for "wind" and "spirit," the word *ruach*. Job seems to be making a distinction between physical breath that God gives to keep us alive and the Spirit (supernatural breath) that keeps us alive by the application of His sustaining power; this sustaining power is sent forth and decreed by the Father, created through the Son, and now applied by the Spirit.

Once again, as we saw earlier in the section where we looked at the Trinity, it seems that we see this very principle put into practice, that the Divine Order of the Trinity is that everything comes “from” the Father, “through” the Son, “by” the Holy Spirit. Thus we have further understanding of who God is and how He has chosen to function and interact with His creation in each of the three unique Persons of the Trinity.

## The Age of Creation

An incredible amount of discussion, argument, and dissention has been had over the topic of the big question of “when” and “how long” the activities of the creation took place. This is a huge topic, one that demands much more time and energy for those who wish to dive into it. For our purposes I will simply highlight a few key points.

First of all, much of what is up for discussion is the nature of the writing and language of **Genesis 1** and **2**. Is it literal? Symbolic? Poetic? Both? Is the word used for “day,” which is the Hebrew word *yom*, literally mean “one 24 hour period,” as it sometimes does, or does it mean “an undetermined age of time,” as it also sometimes does (such as the phrase “in that day”)? Did God really create everything with a couple spoken words, or did He create everything millions of years ago and then let it slowly evolve?

Secondly, we should address what I believe are the most important aspects of these questions in order to set precedent for our search. These are what I would call the “non-negotiable” elements of deciding what we believe:

- God created all things out of nothing
- God created all things by His own initiative, as part of His desire and will
- God sustains all things by the power of His Word
- God was intimately involved in creation, and He is still currently intimately involved in all things since

If you believe these things, you have one of a few main choices when approaching creation.

- **The “Old Earth” Theory:** This is a term that has a number of varying views that stem from it. However, in basic, it states that the earth is older than what a literal biblical account would point to (roughly 10,000-20,000 years old). Those that hold to it believe that the word *yom* is a word that is used as ages over which God created, thereby agreeing with a more modern scientific view based on man’s findings that the earth is hundreds of millions and even billions of years old.
- **The “Young Earth” Theory:** This theory takes a more literal approach to the creation account, and believes that the earth is indeed more in line with what we can ascertain from Scripture. Many supporters of this view would maintain that scientific evidence of an old earth and old creation that points to an older age is possible because God could have created a “mature” creation. For instance, Adam and Eve were not formed as embryos, but as full-grown adults. Even though they were literally one day old, they appeared to be, say 20 years old when they were created.

There is a lot of great material that has been written on this topic,<sup>208</sup> but I would like to point out a couple things. First of all, committed, Bible-believing Christians can agree to all the previously listed “non-negotiable” four bullet points and hold to either theory. To believe in an old earth does not necessarily put science as an authority over the Bible or negate the infallibility of the Bible. What would *not* be right for us to believe is that God was not involved in the process at all or that the **Genesis** account is pure fable.

## Natural and Spiritual

So we have seen briefly then that God created the physical heavens and the earth over a period of six *yom* (I’ll just leave that open for you to decide what you think a *yom* is). In this span of time, He made all things. As an artist, He made every weird animal, every bizarre fish, every mountain and valley. He placed every speck of dust on the ground and every drop of water on the earth. But He also created another very important part of creation; one that remains, for now, somewhat of a mystery for us, but God has given us some insight into this aspect of creation, much of which we will see as we continue. This is the spiritual realm of creation.

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<sup>208</sup> See the resources at the end of this chapter.

Before we dive into the spiritual realm of creation, a few things should be considered. In much of human history, humanity has often seen physical as being “bad” and spiritual as being “good.” Humans of many religions and philosophies have thought that our bodies, the earth, and anything physical is “carnal,” “fleshly,” “sinful,” or “ungodly” because it is “unspiritual.” Sometimes we equate physical with “temporal,” and spiritual as “eternal.”

This was common with the people in the Bible, and was incredibly evident with the New Testament Greeks. Their culture was dramatically shaped by the thoughts of Greek philosophers who taught that the spiritual realm was something to be attained, and the physical realm was something to be detested. This ideal is largely built on the teachings of Plato, and therefore is called *Platonism*. ♣

It was Platonic concepts that kept the church at Corinth so immature. You know the section on spiritual gifts in **1 Corinthians 12**? We often think that this particular section is a great and beautiful verbalization of Paul’s to build up the faith of the church in their spiritual gifts. But this isn’t so! The Corinthians were such immature Christians, they were butchering the use of the gifts, so Paul was setting them straight! One of their problems is that they thought that by doing the super cool “spiritual” gifts, that was a mark of maturity and spirituality. They viewed the “physical” gifts, such as organization and administration, as “lower” gifts.

Paul’s response? **1 Corinthians 12.4** reveals him reminding them this:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

He goes on to say that there should be no division amongst the church and that they are all needed for a healthy body. Their Platonic view was further evidenced in **chapter 15** when Paul is shown as being amazed that they didn’t know what their resurrection body would be like. They believed, as a Platonist would, that they would be disembodied, spirit-like beings, rather than raised-from-the-dead physical bodies. After all, for them, spiritual equals good, physical equals bad.

In the first couple centuries of the church, heretical sects of Christianity called Gnosticism and Manichaeism were teaching the very same thing, that some kind of “escape from the prison of physical life” was the way to real Christ glorifying spirituality. This is called *dualism*, ♣ and even though it was quashed in those early days, today in the church, we have become rampant with legalism and calling good, God-given aspects of life as “evil” or “sinful.” Sometimes in our rhetoric, we may not go that far, but we will use terms such as “secular” (which simply means that it is neutral, like a rock or a tree) and make it out, in practice, to be “not God glorifying.”

We also seem to always want to make distinction between “Christian” and “non-Christian.” But this is all just nonsense, because all that God has made is good, and He has given us creation to subdue and use for His glory. John Piper said, “Christianity is not a platonic religion that regards material things as mere shadows of reality, which will be sloughed off as soon as possible.” The physical world that God has made is “good,” and it was made for our enjoyment and to be under our care.

As part of our goal to “glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” we are called to glorify Him in whatever we do (*so long as it is not sin*). Part of this is enjoying all the blessings He has given us, whether part of His creation or part of our creation that we create *from* His creation (*so long as we don’t idolize or abuse them*). These include, but are not at all limited to:

Animals, cars, computers, Disneyland, jazz music, art, baseball, friends, studying, the internet, traveling, underwater basket-weaving, medicine, dancing, watching movies, ice cream (as long as there are no nuts in it), science, sex, singing, collecting lint, telling jokes, and the list goes on and on and on.

Martin Luther said “You know, there’s stars in the sky and certain astrologers worship them. If it’s causing them to stumble, then we have to find a way to take them down.” Of course he was joking (which is amazing, a Lutheran with a sense of humor!), and his point was well made (as a matter of fact, Martin Luther’s wife was an ex-Catholic nun turned brew-master by trade!).

All this to be said is that when God made the heavens and the earth and all that was in it, “it was good.” The problem, as we saw last week, is not the objects that we worship, but it is our heart of worship that is off the mark. It’s not for us to call good things “bad” and bad things “good,” else we put ourselves in the place of God and call Him a liar.

Of course, this doesn't mean that it's open season on all things. We must have wisdom, prudence, and self-control with all things. Not everyone is equally able to enjoy everything available to them for many reasons. Sex is a gift for the married, not to be taken outside of God's design for marriage and sex. Some, due to their past or personal temptation, have to abstain from ice cream or alcohol or other things that draw them into sin. But the overarching point is exactly what Paul said to Timothy in **1 Timothy 4.4, 5**, that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."<sup>209</sup>

So, without further adieu, let's look at this spiritual (yet not "more godly") realm of creation.

## ANGELS

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not just *a* community, but as we have seen they are *the epitome* of community.<sup>210</sup> Yet despite that, it is interesting to note that, aside from He Himself being a Triune, "communal" God, we also know that at some point in the six *yom* of creation,<sup>211</sup> God had chosen to create angels.

There are many similarities between us and angels, most specifically that we are both moral agents, meaning that we can choose right and wrong, as we will see in the next chapter. Angels are intriguing to us because of the very fact that they pre-exist us and are unseen by us. Since the Word tells us some information about them, it's right that we spend some time looking at them.

Here are some of the things we know about angels:

- They were created, like we were, and are moral creatures.
- They are spiritual, though at times God has sent them in the form of a physical body.<sup>212</sup>
- Part of their job is to protect us, in part by engaging in battle with demons (more on this in the next section).<sup>213</sup>
- They worship and glorify God.<sup>214</sup>
- Angels are also called "sons of God,"<sup>215</sup> "holy ones,"<sup>216</sup> "spirits,"<sup>217</sup> "watchers,"<sup>218</sup> "principalities and powers," "authorities," and other various terms.<sup>219</sup> There are also specific angelic creatures (they may or may not be distinct from angels), such as cherubim, seraphim, and the "Living Creatures." All these various terms point to a very organized infrastructure or order of authority or placement within the angelic/heavenly beings.
- The angels also have names, though only two are known to us: Gabriel and Michael, both of whom are considered to be arch-angels, which are angels of higher rank.<sup>220</sup>
- Angels are *not* omniscient, omnipresent, nor omnipotent. They are given their tasks from God alone, they do not know all things, and they can only be in one place at one time. That said, we don't know about their method of travel (can they "appear" thousands of miles away in an instant, so long as they are only in one place at a time?). We also know that they do have great God-given power, as they are incredibly called in **Psalm 103.20** "the mighty ones who do His Word." Once again, we see the power and focus of God's desire being carried out by and through His Word!
- There are an unknown amount of angels, but the number Scripture gives us is "ten thousands of ten thousands" and "innumerable."<sup>221</sup>
- Angels do not marry.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Romans 14.1-8 // Titus 1.15 // 1 Corinthians 6.12 // 1 Corinthians 10.23-11.1

<sup>210</sup> John 17.5, 24

<sup>211</sup> All verses about creation speak of the heavens and "all that is in them" having been created in the six days of creation. See Nehemiah 9.6, Colossians 1.16, Genesis 2.1, Exodus 20.11

<sup>212</sup> Hebrews 1.14, Luke 24.39, Numbers 22.31, Luke 2.13, Matthew 28.5, Hebrews 13.2

<sup>213</sup> Though the Scriptures point to the task of angels defending us, the belief of a specially assigned "guardian angel" is not in the Bible. Furthermore, it is *definitely* unbiblical to refer to loved ones who have passed away as our "guardian angels." Scripture is clear that we do not become angels when we die, and we are not sent to earth to guard our loved ones. We will see more of this in **Chapter 12**.

<sup>214</sup> Hebrews 12.22

<sup>215</sup> Job 1.6

<sup>216</sup> Psalm 89.5

<sup>217</sup> Hebrews 1.14

<sup>218</sup> Daniel 4.13

<sup>219</sup> Colossians 1.16

<sup>220</sup> There are *technically* three named angels if you include Satan, who was a former angel. However, for Gabriel and Michael, see Jude 9, Revelation 12.7, 8, Daniel 10.13, 21, Luke 1.19.

<sup>221</sup> Deuteronomy 33.2 // Psalm 68.17

<sup>222</sup> Matthew 22.30

- We are not to try to communicate with them, whether through invocation or through prayer or through worship. Though, as seen in the Word, if they *are* to appear to us, we can talk with them (though still not worship them).<sup>223</sup>
- Angels are temporarily above us, since we are sinful. But as we will see in future chapters, God has a greater and more ultimate plan for us.

I think it is going to be very interesting meeting the angels, because though we have not known them by name, we will meet many of them who will know us. Though we will have the incredible task of having authority over them in heaven, it seems to me that we will probably enjoy a friendship with them, as they are actual beings with actual minds that actually speak.<sup>224</sup>

As a matter of fact, they may even tell us stories about watching us grow up and how God sent them to intervene on our behalf. Imagine them telling us stories of the time we were tempted to sin and they came wielding the sword of the Word of God and fighting off demons as we made our decision!

I can picture it now, using what I call “sanctified imagination,” walking with an angel in heaven and running into another angel.

“Hey Bob,” the first angel says, “I want to introduce you to someone. This is Jobey; do you remember Jobey?”

He looks at me, pauses, and thinks out loud, “Jobey...Jobey...oh, yeah! You mean *Jobey* Jobey?”

“Of course *Jobey* Jobey. How many Jobeys do you know?”

“Oh yeah, well it’s been so long...he was the one that almost made that really stupid mistake and God sent me and you and a few of the other angels to fight off those demons that Satan sent over to tempt him! Man, that was an *awesome* battle! Remember how I clocked that one demon and he ran away crying?”

“Uh, no, Bob, actually *you* were the one that got clocked by the demon and *you* ran crying.”

“Oh. Oh yeah...well pleased to meet you, glad it all worked out for you. Pretty wild that God chose you. I definitely didn’t see that one coming.”

Okay, so I may have taken a *little* liberty in telling a possible story. But in all honesty, I think that this basic idea is very truly a possibility: that life in eternity is going to be a place full of true history reminiscing and epic stories! We will look at this more in **Chapter 12**.

After God created the entire universe and all the animals that were in it, He saw that indeed “it was good.”<sup>225</sup> So if it “was good,” and if we saw in the first section that God, being a Triune God, has *perfect* love, fellowship, care, communion, passion, and unity within Himself, and He even has the angels as extra (though unneeded) company, why didn’t He just stop there if He was on a roll?

It becomes interesting, because although God put tremendous thought and care into the creation of His earth, we also have to recognize that it is not the focus of the Word of God. As a matter of fact, it gets very little stage time. When looking at the context of the whole Bible, we see that He necessarily starts with creation (and furthermore, beautifully ends with “re”-creation), but very quickly turns His attention elsewhere, as He wasn’t quite finished. As the final perfect finishing touch on an absolutely perfect creation, the Trinitarian God decided to create something as the pinnacle of His creation. And it is to that, now, that we turn our attention to, as we see God’s great creativity and mind revealed to us in the pinnacle of His creation: mankind.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Revelation 19.9, 10

<sup>224</sup> Randy Alcorn’s book *Heaven* has a lot of interesting observations about angels and other heaven related questions. Many of these questions we will consider in **Chapter 12**.

<sup>225</sup> Genesis 1.25

<sup>226</sup> Genesis 1-2

## THE PINNACLE OF GOD'S CREATION

So life is good for God's creation. Things are going great. It's Friday, and God's weekend was quickly approaching; it was just about time to relax after a long week at the office. But He wanted something unique, something special, something that would be the pinnacle of His creation. We see this unfold in **Genesis 1.26**.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

The first thing you may notice is amazing, that God describes Himself as "Us." As we have already *implicitly* seen in **Genesis 1.1, 2** that the three Persons of the Trinity were involved in creation, now we are again *explicitly* seeing that They *all* are taking part in the "making" of creating us in Their image, reminding us of the previous verses we saw.<sup>227</sup>

We also see that we are given dominion over everything on, in, over, and under the earth as well as the earth itself. God not only made all things good, but He is giving mankind the deed to the land. The earth is ours to take care of, dwell on, and have dominion over. This has a few important practical and spiritual implications.

- We are to take care of the earth, not abuse it.
- Yet we are also to have dominion over it, so we *can* use it. Using nature to create homes, technology, transportation, recreation, clothing, fuel, food, and anything else the earth provides is ours to use responsibly.
- We were given the task to name the animals, and as the created rulers of the earth, it is also our task to protect them. God created both man and animal to dwell together on this good earth, with man having been given dominion.
- We are to take precedence over the animals. Though we don't abuse them or neglect them, God cares more for humans than He does animals. We alone are made in His image. Of course, God *does* love animals, so by being in His image we should love them as well, but at the end of the day, humans are the pinnacle and priority, not animals. This may sound cold at first, but just think of your cat and then think of your child. There's a difference.
- In addition to the earth itself, we can also use animals for food, clothing, and other tools or materials (including the petroleum from dead animals). Remember that it was God who gave Adam and Eve their first pair of matching leather pants and jackets.

But more than anything, and something that we have to take notice of in the grand scheme of God's plan, is that man was made for the earth, and the earth was made for man. This is our home, just as God created it, and it was good.

## IMAGE OF GOD: MALE AND FEMALE

We also notice this other very curious phrase in **Genesis 1.26** when God says that we humans are made "in Our image." This is what many scholars call the doctrine of *imago Dei*,<sup>♣</sup> which is a Latin term that means "image of God." What this signifies is that mankind was indeed created as the image of God, and it is mankind alone that holds this great description. Of all the stars, galaxies, birds of the air, creatures of the greatest depths of the sea, even the angels, it is only us that were specifically made in the image of God.

But what, exactly, does that mean? How can we be "like God," and how does this make us distinct from the rest of creation?

Before moving directly into that question, and also to help us understand it, we need to look at the very next observation that God makes upon making man in His image. In **Genesis 2** we see that God gave life to His first created man, named Adam (*adam* is the Hebrew word for "man"), then placed Adam in a garden called the Garden of Eden that God Himself had planted, gave him the job of tending it and gave him one basic rule: to not eat of tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Then God makes a statement that is quite interesting. He said that it was "not good for man to be alone," and resolves that He would "make a helper suitable for him." The interesting thing, however, is that Adam *wasn't* alone. God was

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<sup>227</sup> Colossians 1.15-20 // Hebrews 1.1-4 // John 1.1-5, 14 // Job 33.4 // Psalm 104.30

there. But this gives us some insight, I believe, into God's love and passion for community, like-mindedness, and compatibility, as well as His intricate and specific design for human intimacy, unity, and matrimony. Though we were made to be in His image, and as we see with Adam and to have an unhindered relationship with God, we weren't like Him in all ways, as we will soon see. Inasmuch as we, in our original design, had unbroken fellowship with God, God still saw a need, as it were, for man to have a like partner; a helper, even, to be even more specific.

As the story somewhat humorously unfolds, God brought all the animals to Adam one by one to have Adam name them. Quite an awesome task, but apparently, as **verse 20** reveals, part of this task wasn't just naming the animals, but to find a suitable helper. In my odd sense of humor I almost see that God was setting Adam up on some blind dates and casually observing to see if there were any sparks. But alas, the story goes, "for Adam no suitable helper was found." Thank God!

So God did what He deemed absolute best in **Genesis 2.21-23**:

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.<sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.<sup>23</sup> Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Then as His decree to them, He says in **Genesis 1.27, 28**:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

## MADE IN THE IMAGE OF THE TRINITARIAN GOD

So God created mankind in the form of two genders, male and female.<sup>228</sup> Both were made equally in His image, and both made to complement each other. From the beginning, God created this image of Himself to reflect even His Trinitarian nature. Between man and woman, and more specifically, husband and wife, we see varying attributes of the Trinity being made evident in the marriage relationship. Specifically, we see that with man and woman there is solidarity in that they are made equally in God's image, like the three Persons of the Trinity are co-equally God in their attributes and essence; we see a mysterious unity<sup>229</sup> despite the distinction of persons; we see that there is a unity that is embodied in part by love and relationship and the very fact that no other creature was suitable for man; yet we also see a diversity in role and responsibility that complements each other through submission.<sup>230</sup>

Even amidst life within the body of Christ, we see more striking resemblances of what we call God's "economy." As His body, we know that we have solidarity with each other as each and every one of us were equally made in His image. We also know that we are unified as one body, we are a people, not persons, made known largely through love, fellowship, and relationship. Yet lastly, despite this co-equality and oneness, we also are diverse as we mutually submit to each other in our varying roles and responsibilities. Again, not in inferiority or as a "lesser than" tier, but in role and responsibility.<sup>231</sup>

Notice some of these principles we see in the Trinity, and how they are demonstrated also within human relationships.

### PRINCIPLES WE FIND IN THE TRINITY:

- Equal in essence, attribute (holiness, deity, eternal power)<sup>232</sup>
- Unified in relationship, love, oneness, and community<sup>233</sup>
- Diversified in role, responsibility, and submission<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Genesis 1.26-31

<sup>229</sup> Ephesians 5.31 // 1 Corinthians 6.16 // Mark 10.8 // Genesis 2.24

<sup>230</sup> Ephesians 5.21-33

<sup>231</sup> See Chapter II and XI for more on this. Also, see the resource section at the end of this chapter for a *number* of great resources, books, web articles, and sermons.

<sup>232</sup> Philippians 2.6 // John 5.18 // John 1.1-14

<sup>233</sup> John 10.30, 17.11, 22 //

<sup>234</sup> Ephesians 1.1-14 // John 13.2-17 // Mark 10.45 // 2 Thessalonians 2.13, 14 // 1 Peter 1.1, 2 // John 3.16, 5.23-27, 6.57, 8.16, 12.49, 15.26, 17.21, 20.21 // Matthew 26.42 // Galatians 4.6

## The Same Principles Applied to Life in Marriage and the Body of Christ:

- Equal in essence, attribute (value and place in Christ, being made in His image)<sup>235</sup>
- Unified in relationship, love, oneness, and community<sup>236</sup>
- Diversified in role, responsibility, and submission<sup>237</sup>

And so here in the creation of an image bearer and his inter-relationships, we have a picture, an image of the Trinity, a work of art that when finished it was declared “very good”;<sup>238</sup> and rightfully so, it was indeed very good, as it can only be very good if it is the very image of God. How could it be anything less than perfect?

Yet for us it can be difficult to believe that mankind is truly the pinnacle of creation and the true image of God. We have become so accustomed to the humankind that we know today: selfish, lazy, arrogant, and inconsiderate, as well as sick, aging, and dying. But this is not how it all began, this is not God’s original design for man. His original design was flawless, made in His image, which is neither selfish, lazy, arrogant, inconsiderate, sick, aging, nor dying.

## ✠ HOMOSEXUALITY AND TRANSGENDERISM ✠

Of important note is how this important doctrine affects how we see our bodies, gender, marriage, and sexuality. And while a full treatment of this topic would require its own study (see our notes from our Parenting Workshop from 2024 that dealt specifically with walking pre-teens and teens through the landscape of sexuality and sexual ethics in this ever-changing landscape), it is important for us to address it as it pertains to God’s creation.

Let’s look again at the story of the creation of Adam and God’s desire to bring him a partner:

- Firstly, Adam was not truly “alone.” He had God, and the animals, and God could have employed the angels to be companions as well.
- But God wanted Adam to have a “complementary” companion. That said, he *could have* simply made another male. And this does *not* imply homosexuality, because even the design of marriage and sex was not yet created (nor would be “necessary” for God’s plan. He very well could have had *individual males* build “sandcastle people” just like God did as His plan to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.”). In other words, sex and marriage was not *necessary* in God’s design, and He could have simply filled the earth with one gender.
- However, God went above and beyond a simple “multiplication” plan. He made a complementarily designed second gender, and for specific purposes. Additionally, He created the design of marriage for these two complementary people to come together as one. *But even still*, sex was not “necessary.” He could have *still* had this complementary couple build “sandcastle people” in the backyard in the same manner that God created them. But He didn’t. He *again* went above and beyond.
- God chooses to create the design of sex and sexual union. He designed a very intimate, deeply personal, unifying encounter for these two equal but different and complementary people to come together and mysteriously be made into one. And this would not just be for procreation. He designed sex specifically to be enjoyable and exciting. He created body parts and bodily functions that could be stimulated and experience deep pleasure. None of this was necessary, but it was God’s idea, and it was “very good.”

One very unique factor in God creating only two genders and how they are both made in God’s image is found in His very own essence as a Trinitarian God. The nature of the Trinity is a profound mystery: three Persons, yet only one God. Perfect unity and oneness, intimacy, and deep enjoyment of each other. As we’ve seen, the three Persons of the Trinity are equal in essence, value, and attribute, yet are diverse in their roles and responsibilities. Likewise, the design of God to have two distinct genders made in His image reflect that very truth. Men and women are equal in their essence and value, yet are distinct in their roles and responsibilities. Neither is more valuable, and neither is expendable. The two complement each other perfectly.

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<sup>235</sup> Galatians 3.26-29 // Ephesians 2.11-22 // Revelation 5.6-10

<sup>236</sup> 1 Corinthians 10.17 // John 17.11, 21, 22 // Acts 2.42-47 // John 17.21, 22

<sup>237</sup> 1 Corinthians 12 // Romans 12.3-8 // Ephesians 4.11, 12, 5.21-6.9 // 1 Corinthians 16.15, 16 // Romans 13.1-7 // 1 Peter 2.11-25 // 1 Timothy 3.1-13

<sup>238</sup> Genesis 1.31

God's design for sexuality and marriage is good. It is a design for two complementary genders, male and female, to come together to become one.<sup>239</sup> Both the Old and New Testament affirms that heterosexual union is the only marriage that God has designed,<sup>240</sup> and anything else would be creating an "alternate" type of union that is not actually marriage by God's definition. One unique fault of same-sex sexual relationships is not only an abandonment of God's design for sex and marriage, but it is also an attack on God's reflection of Himself in His design of marriage.

And to go even further, we see in **Ephesians 5.32** that marriage, from the very beginning, had another mysterious purpose that was not fully understood until after the death and resurrection of Christ. From the very beginning, God had intended to be a picture not only of Himself as a Trinitarian God, but also of a much greater and more eternal marital union: the union between Christ and the church.

This was a "mystery" that was hidden until the full picture of the Gospel came into view after Christ's death and resurrection. So marriage, the way that God designed it, is not only a picture of the Trinity but even of the Gospel itself. It is important for us to understand that marriage is not "for us" as much as it is "for God." It is one of His beautiful means to display His Gospel and to bring glory to Himself. Sadly, our common approach to marriage (be it heterosexual marriages or homosexual "unions") are used for our own glory, satisfaction, and fulfillment. But we are neither the creators of marriage, nor are we the *owners* of marriage, and it is wrong for us to use marriage sinfully (again, even heterosexual Christian marriages can abuse the gift of marriage).

Every marriage ought to be a reflection of the Gospel and a reflection of the Trinity. Marriage is rooted in God's creation from the beginning, and to hijack it for our own purposes is to cause offense and attack on God as Creator and on the very nature of the Trinity.

Additionally, the claim might be made that someone is "born this way," whether it be with homosexual desire, or in the "wrong body." And again, while this study can't go into the important depths of teasing out that claim, it should be said that *even if* that were the case (and believers have varying ways of viewing this), this *still* does not give credence to the idea of living it out. For instance, heterosexual men and women are both prone to promiscuity, premarital sex, and being attracted to people who are not their spouse, but just because that is "natural" does not mean it is okay. Humans are born prone to anger and jealousy, but this does not mean it is okay or to be pursued or excused simply because it is natural. In the case of the "wrong body" claim, which is a much more dubious claim than simple same-sex attraction, it should be acknowledged that there are plenty of physical and mental illnesses that trouble humans, even from birth, but this doesn't mean that it is to be celebrated as part of God's original design.

So now that we have seen some of the details of God's creation of man as male and female, we can look now to see what it is to be made in His image. Let us first examine some of the attributes that make up the character of God so we can rightly see what the image should even resemble.

## ♣ IN WHAT WAYS CAN WE BE LIKE GOD? ♣

We first have to distinguish between what we would call *incommunicable* and *communicable attributes of God*. ♣ Simply defined, incommunicable attributes are attributes that cannot (and will never) be shared, or commuted, between God and man. In other words, these are attributes that only God can have. Communicable attributes, on the other hand, are attributes that that God has, but that man can also have.

### INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES:

**Omnipresence:** ♣ the ability to be anywhere and everywhere all at one time. This rightly describes that He is ever present, but this is not an attribute that man will ever or has ever had. Man is a physical image of God, complete with a Spirit, but God is a spirit and is not confined to a physical body.<sup>241</sup>

**Omnipotence:** ♣ the ability to be all-powerful, and is also a God-only attribute. Man, despite our delusions, will never and has never been all-powerful. Man was indeed given dominion over creation, but omnipotence wasn't part of the design.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Matthew 19.4, 5

<sup>240</sup> Genesis 19.1-13, Leviticus 18.22, 20.13, Romans 1.26, 27, 1 Corinthians 6.9, 1 Timothy 1.10

<sup>241</sup> Ephesians 4.6 // 1 Kings 8.27

<sup>242</sup> Jeremiah 32.27 // Ephesians 3.20 // 2 Corinthians 6.18 // Matthew 19.26

**Omniscience:**♣ the ability to know all. Only God will hold the knowledge and answers to everything. We know that He is not knowable in totality, and this is part of what makes God.<sup>243</sup>

**Eternal:** God alone is eternal. Though we are *given* eternal life, our life had a starting point. When it comes to all things, there is the Creator (eternal), and the creation (not eternal). In Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, he writes, "God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time."<sup>244</sup> God alone is eternal, and God alone has existed forever into "eternity past" and into "eternity future."<sup>245</sup>

### COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES:

This is where it gets interesting, because some of these are attributes that we are simply not used to hearing in the context of humanity. However, when we picture mankind in its original, image of God design, we start to see how far we have fallen from that design. Here are a few of these attributes:

- Holy<sup>246</sup>
- Perfect<sup>247</sup>
- Compassionate<sup>248</sup>
- Generous<sup>249</sup>
- Selfless
- Righteous<sup>250</sup>
- Just<sup>251</sup>
- Relational
- Peaceful<sup>252</sup>
- Secure<sup>253</sup>
- Bold<sup>254</sup>
- Creative<sup>255</sup>
- Loving<sup>256</sup>
- Authentic<sup>257</sup>
- Servant minded<sup>258</sup>
- Self-controlled<sup>259</sup>
- Joyful<sup>260</sup>
- Loyal<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Job 37.16 // 1 John 3.20 // 1 Corinthians 2.10, 11 // Hebrews 4.13

<sup>244</sup> pg. 168

<sup>245</sup> Psalm 90.2 // Revelation 1.8 // Exodus 3.14

<sup>246</sup> Leviticus 20.7, 26 // 1 Peter 1.15, 16, 2.5

<sup>247</sup> Deuteronomy 18.13 // John 17.23 // Colossians 1.28 // 1 Peter 5.10

<sup>248</sup> Zechariah 7.9 // Ephesians 4.32 // Colossians 3.12 // 1 Peter 3.8

<sup>249</sup> Proverbs 11.25 // 1 Timothy 6.18

<sup>250</sup> Genesis 7.1 // Psalm 34.17, 92.12, 146.8 // Romans 2.13 // 1 John 3.7

<sup>251</sup> Proverbs 20.7 // Luke 14.14 // Romans 1.17

<sup>252</sup> 2 Samuel 20.19 // 1 Timothy 2.2

<sup>253</sup> Job 11.18 // Psalm 16.5

<sup>254</sup> Psalm 138.3 // 2 Chronicles 3.12 // Proverbs 28.1

<sup>255</sup> Genesis 1.22 // Exodus 31.4, 35.35 // Ephesians 5.19 // 2 Chronicles 5.13 // Psalm 33.2, 101.1

<sup>256</sup> Hebrews 13.1 // 1 John 5.2

<sup>257</sup> James 5.16 // Philippians 2.3

<sup>258</sup> Luke 12.35 // 1 Corinthians 9.12, 12.5 // Ephesians 4.12 // 1 Timothy 1.12

<sup>259</sup> Romans 8.6, 9 // 1 Thessalonians 5.6, 8 // Titus 2.12

<sup>260</sup> Psalm 68.3 // Psalm 100.2 // Habakkuk 3.18 // Romans 12.12 // 1 Thessalonians 5.16 // All of Philippians

<sup>261</sup> 1 Chronicles 29.18 // Philippians 4.3

## So Why Did He Choose to Make Us?

So, back to the question at hand. If God had no need for fellowship, why did He create us? Allow me again to use the example of an earthly artist or musician. I can think of many writers, artists, and musicians that I believe are incredibly gifted at what they do. For me, it's bands and musicians like the Beatles, Johnny Cash, U2, Lester Young, Dave Brubeck and any number of traditional Irish music groups and jazz ensembles; artists such as Escher, Van Gogh, and my Dad; writers such as C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, J.I. Packer, and John Stott; and even movie makers like the minds who created *Life is Beautiful*, *the Muppets*, *the Star Wars* (original) trilogy, and the *Indiana Jones* trilogy.

All of these men and women are creators. If they kept their creations to themselves, it wouldn't make them any less creative or amazing at what they do. *However*, their works, their minds, their thoughts, even their "glory" would just simply not be known. Yet it is the very fact that they shared their creations that it has first of all, brought them glory, and second of all, become a blessing to those who previously did not know them.

Of course, this analogy has faults. We know that their talents are from the Lord only and that glory should go to Him. We also know that selfish human motive for fame and fortune is a factor in their hope for their creation being known. But the point should be taken, that God was not "less glorious" when it was just Him sitting around. God would be just as glorious twiddling His thumbs as He would be creating galaxies. It's just that His glory wouldn't be known, and part of His desire to have His glory known is because He *knows* that His glory would be an incredible *blessing* to those who get to enjoy it.

And so we see an incredible dichotomy in God's heart behind the creation of man, that:

### **We were created *for* His glory and *because* of His love.**

Look at **Ephesians 1.4-6** which says that "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." The fact that God created us, created this world, and then chose us "in love" and "to the praise of His glorious grace" the evidence that we were created for His glory and because of His love.

His creation, with us as the pinnacle, declares the majesty of His glory.

His creation, with us as the pinnacle, declares the extravagance of His love.

But let us be very clear about this. When we say that God created us as the pinnacle of His creation and that we were created to enjoy a relationship with God and be loved by Him, we must *not* make salvation about us. We must not make our faith about us. We must not make God's focus about us.

We must take notice that I did not say that we are the pinnacle of *everything*, but merely the pinnacle of creation. Rather, the pinnacle of *everything* is God Himself. Additionally, while we may be the pinnacle of creation, we are not the *center* of creation. The *only way* we can receive the love that He offers is if *He Himself* is rightly made the center of *everything*! It's for this reason that John Piper created his own adaptation of the famous *Westminster Confession of Faith* segment quoted above as he states that:

### **The chief end of God is to glorify Himself and enjoy Himself forever.**

Think about it for a second.

What are your thoughts on this idea? Surely you are thinking "but isn't that selfish?" Or maybe, "doesn't the Bible say that love does not seek its own?"<sup>262</sup> So how could this be?"

Does God not say that He is a jealous God? Jealous for what? Glory. Worship. Honor. Does this mean He is self-centered? Well, as a matter of fact, it actually does. But would you want it any other way? What else would you really

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<sup>262</sup> 1 Corinthians 13.5

want God centered onto other than His own glorious, holy, loving, eternal, compassionate self? What else would you *really* want at the center of everything? You? Me? Us? Not hardly.

God's aim *all throughout the Bible* is to bring glory to Himself. Why? Because He alone is worthy to be glorified! And when He is glorified and put at the center of everything, we, the pinnacle of His creation, are able to see the glory of God and then we too can *glorify God and enjoy Him forever!*

Do you see how this works? We are not at the center of God's "universe," but God alone is at the center of His "universe." And when this happens, when God is rightly exalted, we all receive the great and many blessings because He is made known!

Consider this: if someone had discovered the cure for every cancer in the world, would you want them to stay hidden and in humble secrecy, so as to not draw attention to themselves? Or would you rather them be "glorified" in the world and have them "show off" their discovery and seek to become famous so that their cure could be enjoyed by all who need it? Clearly, in this case, we would want that scientist or biologist to be glorified and made famous, because when he gets the glory, the world gets the benefit!

In this same way, it is good, right, loving, and righteous for God to seek His own glory, because when He gets the glory, we get the benefit!

Piper continues by saying:

God is the one Being in the entire universe for whom self-centeredness, or the pursuit of his own glory, is the ultimately loving act. For him, self-exaltation is the highest virtue. When he does all things "for the praise of his glory," he preserves for us and offers to us, the only thing in the entire world, which can satisfy our longings. God is for us, and therefore has been, is now and always will be, first, for himself. I urge you not to resent the centrality of God in his own affections, but to experience it as the fountain of your everlasting joy.<sup>263</sup>

What is even more beautiful about this truth is that of all the communicable attributes that we can share with God, this truly is indeed the greatest of them all: the desire to glorify God. Yes, to glorify God is to be like Him, *in His* image, because He Himself desires to glorify Himself. Look at some of these verses:

**Psalm 48.9-11**

"For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off.<sup>10</sup> Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. <sup>11</sup> For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another."

**Jeremiah 13.11**

"I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me," declares the LORD, "that they might be for me a people, a praise, and a glory..."

**Psalm 106.7-8**

Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider thy wonderful works...but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power.

**Isaiah 42.8**

I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

**1 Samuel 12.20, 22**

Fear not, you have done all this evil yet do not turn aside from following the Lord...<sup>22</sup> For the Lord will not cast away his people for his great name's sake.

**2 Thessalonians 1.9-10**

Those who do not obey the gospel will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at in all who have believed.

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<sup>263</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/is-god-for-us-or-for-himself--2>

And so we see, that this is indeed the *only* “self-centeredness” that is truly generous, loving, and full of grace. It is God’s desire for His own glory that becomes the means for His gift of grace to us hopeless sinners. And so it is for this very reason of God’s worthiness of exaltation and glorification that we seek, in desiring to be like Him, to glorify Him in all that we do.

So how do we take part in glorifying God and placing Him in the center of all things? Again, John Piper says:

### **God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.**

This is quite a thought: to be satisfied in Him. For the creation to find pure enjoyment in knowing our Creator is the absolute epitome of glorifying its Creator.

I mean think about that. Have you ever made something for someone? A card, or even bought a thoughtful gift? Or even your own child? What blesses you the most? When someone receives your gift and they say “I love it! It’s perfect!” Or maybe “I wouldn’t change anything about it!” Or if your child says “I couldn’t imagine living in any other family or having any other parents!” That is ultimate glory. When creation is *satisfied* with the Creator.

Does this describe you? Are you so completely satisfied in Him? Is He your all in all? Here’s a tougher question: would you change anything about your life? Because that reflects your satisfaction in your Creator.

That might sting a little, but let it settle. There are many other gods, yet there is only one God. Which do *you* find satisfaction, joy, peace, comfort, trust, dependence, rest, confidence, identity, and love in? Owning a home? Being able to pay your mortgage? Being in shape? Looking good? Being accepted by your friends? Having a godly husband or loving wife? Having your future planned out? Getting pregnant? Good health? Being in ministry? Your own privacy or rights?

Some of these are good things. As a matter of fact some of them are awesome, God given things, and even things that we can pray and ask the Lord for. Not only that, but we’ve already seen that creation is here for us to enjoy! But they can all be wrongfully glorified and sinfully worshipped. They can all be objects of satisfaction and rob God of His glory and His due role as the Satisfier. But when we are wholly given to God, we will be satisfied. And the thing we sometimes forget, because of our Platonist, Gnostic, and legalistic heritage, is that God *wants us to be satisfied!* Nowhere in the Bible does God say that happiness is bad! Nowhere does He say that pleasure is bad!

### **Pleasure is not the enemy of God; idolatry is!**

It is not the object that we worship that is bad; it is our sinful hearts that falsely worship that need to be fixed! God so wants us to *enjoy* life, *enjoy* creation, *enjoy* Him! Because when we are satisfied, God is most glorified.<sup>264</sup>

As a final thought, it is important to be cognizant of this fact:

### **We are created worshipping.**

Notice I didn’t say “created to worship,” as if it is something that we can stop and start, but we are created *always* worshipping.

This again plays into our ability to glorify God. When we are not glorifying God, we are glorifying something else, as we can’t glorify “nothing.” On the other hand, God is *always* and *unceasingly* glorifying Himself. I wouldn’t go so far as to say He is worshipping Himself, since worship denotes more of a looking upward toward something greater, and there is nothing above God; but God is indeed constantly glorifying Himself, and we are created to do the same.

God has designed us with these previously listed attributes that enable us to have that pure and holy fellowship with Him, our Creator, so that we can glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created this way and were able to have this constant fellowship with God. But it would not remain that way, as something terrible

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<sup>264</sup> For a more in depth study on this, go to [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org) and type in “hedonist” or “hedonism.” Read the various articles that come up, particularly “We Want You to be a Christian Hedonist.” It sounds strange at first, but read the article. Also, see the resources at the end of this chapter.

was about to disrupt this harmony, and God's desire to be our God and for us to be His people would be abruptly and violently interrupted by a devastating intrusion. God's original, perfect, Edenic plan for mankind (or as I playfully call it, the "garden variety of mankind"), was indeed to have us live forever in perfect, unbroken fellowship with God, glorifying Him and enjoying Him and His creation for all eternity.

However, something was about to change this...

# WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

## HOW UNDERSTANDING GOD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN CHANGES YOUR PERSPECTIVE

### Result #1: It Changes How You See a Lost Mankind

One common thing that I see amidst the church too often is an attitude of disdain and even disgust towards non-believers. And I'm not talking about disgust for sin or something like that, but an absolute self-righteous, look down the nose at someone type of attitude. We will even revel in the idea of some of the "worst people," such as the rapists, tyrants, and murderers, rotting in hell. This is quite possibly one of the biggest, most arrogant, prideful, and ignorant things we could possibly do as people who have been freely given God's grace for salvation. What on earth makes us think that we are any better and that we *don't* deserve what these people may now be experiencing? Far be it from us that we take delight in the death of unbelievers. God Himself even said in **Ezekiel 33.11**, "say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!'"

When we look around this dark and cold world, we should indeed see sinners in need of a Savior, but we should *also* see people who were "fearfully and wonderfully made"<sup>265</sup> by a loving Creator. We should see a humanity that was made in God's image. As we will see in the next section, yes, this image got shattered, but we are still God's creation that He loves and He finds no pleasure in the death of those who don't return to their Creator.

### Result #2: It Changes How We View the Sanctity of Life

When we believe that all humans are born in the image of God as His fearfully and wonderfully made workmanship, we should very naturally have a desire to defend and preserve the lives of the living. We are living in a time with an ever-increasing disrespect and nonchalant attitude towards the beauty, power, mystery, majesty and gift of life. Check out a few of these statistics concerning the sanctity of life across the globe:

- 31.1-35.8 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in 2008<sup>266</sup>
- 1.7-2.4 million people died of HIV/AIDS in 2008<sup>267</sup>
- There are between 163 million orphans worldwide (US Government report)<sup>268</sup>
- Every day 5,760 more children become orphans<sup>269</sup>
- Every 2 seconds an orphan "ages out" (leaves the system as an adult) without finding a family (38,493 per day)<sup>270</sup>
- Of these, 60% of girls become prostitutes and 70% of boys become hardened criminals<sup>271</sup>
- Around 10% eventually commit suicide<sup>272</sup>
- 17.7 million women have been victims of attempted or completed rape<sup>273</sup>
- 15% of sexual assault and rape victims are under the age of 12, 44% are under the age of 17<sup>274</sup>
- There are currently 500,000 unborn, frozen but living embryos that are being stored in an embryo bank<sup>275</sup>
- More than half of these unborn babies will be abandoned by the parents<sup>276</sup>
- There have been over 40,000,000 abortions since 1973, which is 3,000 per day<sup>277</sup>
- 95% of abortions are done as birth control
- That includes 25% to postpone having children, 8% don't want any more children, 21% can't afford children

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<sup>265</sup> Psalm 139.14

<sup>266</sup> [www.avert.org/worldstats.htm](http://www.avert.org/worldstats.htm)

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> [www.christianallianceblog.org/?p=790](http://www.christianallianceblog.org/?p=790)

<sup>269</sup> [skywardjourney.wordpress.com/orphan-statistics](http://skywardjourney.wordpress.com/orphan-statistics)

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> National Institute of Justice & Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey. 1998.

<sup>274</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. 2004 National Crime Victimization Survey. 2004.

<sup>275</sup> [http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2006/07/souls\\_on\\_ice.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2006/07/souls_on_ice.html)

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> [www.abortiontv.com](http://www.abortiontv.com)

- Also, 11% say it will disrupt job/school, 14% have a partner that don't want a baby, 12% say they are too young
- Only 1% are due because of rape, 1% because of fetal health problems, and 3% due to mother's health risk

**I've noticed that all the people who are for abortion are alive.**

-Ronald Reagan

These, and countless other topics and statistics, should alarm us, particularly as we identify God's created humanity as being made in His image, something that He has authored and is Lord over.

### **Result #3: It Changes How We View the Covenant of Marriage and Family**

As we also see God's design and His love and passion to keep His design intact, it should change the way we see His desire to uphold the sanctity of marriage and family. More and more, things like covenant of marriage and the design of the family have become more and more unpopular or disregarded. We, as image bearers of God, have taken it upon ourselves to "do family" the way that we see fit, completely turning our backs on the mind of our Creator.

Look at some of these statistics to show the trends of marriage and family:

- The divorce rate for first marriages is 50%, 67% for second marriages, and 74% for third marriages<sup>278</sup>
- Between 36.6 and 38.8% of those divorces occur between the couple's age of 20-24 years old<sup>279</sup>
- 4 out of 10 babies are born to unmarried mothers<sup>280</sup>
- This results in 1.6 million babies per year<sup>281</sup>
- 30 to 60% of all married individuals in the US will engage in infidelity<sup>282</sup>
- The pornography industry made \$97,000,000,000 in 2006<sup>283</sup>
- 1,000,000,000 adult DVDs were rented in the US in 2005<sup>284</sup>
- 70% of men from age 18-34 visit a pornographic website in a typical month<sup>285</sup>
- 20% of all Internet pornography involves children (100,000 child pornography websites)<sup>286</sup>
- Child pornography was a \$3,000,000,000 industry in 2005<sup>287</sup>
- 2/3 of divorces cite pornography as playing a significant role in the divorce<sup>288</sup>
- 8% of men aged 18-44 said they are attracted to the same sex or both. 14% of women said the same<sup>289</sup>
- 43% of white homosexual males have 500 sexual partners. 28% had over 1000<sup>290</sup>
- Out of a study of 2,583 older homosexuals, the average range was between 101-500. 10-15% said 1000+<sup>291</sup>

We again begin to see an alarming trend in the depreciation of our view on the sacred bond of marriage and the design of the family. More and more, we are seeing deterioration and disregard for how God has designed these to be from the beginning of creation.

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<sup>278</sup> [www.divorcerate.org](http://www.divorcerate.org)

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2009/05/13/health/13mothers.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/13/health/13mothers.html)

<sup>281</sup> [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15835429/ns/health-pregnancy/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15835429/ns/health-pregnancy/)

<sup>282</sup> [www.truthaboutdeception.com/cheating-and-infidelity/stats-about-infidelity.html](http://www.truthaboutdeception.com/cheating-and-infidelity/stats-about-infidelity.html)

<sup>283</sup> [www.safefamilies.org/sfStats.php](http://www.safefamilies.org/sfStats.php)

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> [www.traditionalvalues.org/urban/two.php](http://www.traditionalvalues.org/urban/two.php)

<sup>290</sup> [www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IS04C02](http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IS04C02). From a classic study of conducted by Bell and Weinberg.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

## Result #4: It Changes How We View Our Own Lives

- About 5.4% of American (144 million people) encounter serious depression<sup>292</sup>
- 7,000,000 of girls and women have an eating disorder<sup>293</sup>
- Of those, 10% began before age 10, and 33% between ages 11 and 15<sup>294</sup>
- Only 56% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders say they like the way they look<sup>295</sup>
- 50-70% of girls of normal weight believe they are actually overweight<sup>296</sup>
- Over 10.2 million cosmetic procedures were performed in the US in 2008<sup>297</sup>
- Given the pornography and divorce rates above, it makes sense that 92% of these were performed on women<sup>298</sup>
- Of those, 45% were women between 35 and 50, with the top procedures being liposuction and Botox<sup>299</sup>
- 22% were the 19-34 age, with the top procedure being breast augmentation<sup>300</sup>
- \$11,800,000,000 was spent in the US on cosmetic procedures
- 30% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 44.9% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 52.8% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders say they use illicit drugs in 2003<sup>301</sup>
- 14,000,000 Americans were current drug users in 2000, which was 6.3% of the population over age 12<sup>302</sup>
- Every day, 11,318 American youth (12-20 years old) try alcohol for the first time.
- Every day, 6,488 of those same youth try marijuana for the first time; 2,786 for cocaine; 386 for heroin<sup>303</sup>
- In 2005, 32,637 people committed suicide.
- Of those, 4,212 were between 15 and 24, and 5,404 were age 65 or older<sup>304</sup>
- Every 16 minutes someone commits suicide<sup>305</sup>
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 25-34 year olds, second among college students<sup>306</sup>
- More people die from suicide than homicide (suicide is 11<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death, homicide is 13<sup>th</sup>)<sup>307</sup>
- There were 800,000 attempted suicides in 2005<sup>308</sup>

## Result #5: It Changes How We View Creation

Understanding that God's creation was "good" and that He is an Artist who wanted to make His glory known through His creation should change the way we view creation and interact with it. Often times, we have a very negligent attitude toward it as if it is ours to abuse, and will even make theological statements to justify the negligence, such as "well it's all gonna burn anyway."

Conversely, others will go so far as to protect creation at any and all costs, thus falling into a trap of idolatry and the worship of creation. The fact of the matter (which the other "side" will misuse) is that the earth was created for God's glory and we, the pinnacle of His creation (the "very good" part of a "good" creation) were given the job, authority, and command to "subdue" it. It is clear that God designed us to be the tenants *and* the property managers. This means that we do indeed aim to take responsible care for it, but we also can and should use it for our benefit. Where is the line? That is surely unanswerable here, but we as part of God's creation, should seek through His Word, prayer, and counsel how we make many of the decisions in our life concerning God's creation.

A couple quick examples, however, should help or at least further you in your thoughts and considerations. While we should know that the mistreatment of animals (torture, abuse, etc.) is morally unacceptable, we should also know that

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<sup>292</sup> [www.wrongdiagnosis.com/d/depression/stats.htm](http://www.wrongdiagnosis.com/d/depression/stats.htm)

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> [www.cosmeticplasticsurgerystatistics.com/statistics.html](http://www.cosmeticplasticsurgerystatistics.com/statistics.html), a study done by the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS)

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> [www.teendrugabuse.us/teendrugstatistics.html](http://www.teendrugabuse.us/teendrugstatistics.html)

<sup>302</sup> [www.adolescent-substance-abuse.com/national-drug-statistics.html](http://www.adolescent-substance-abuse.com/national-drug-statistics.html)

<sup>303</sup> [www.marininstitute.org/Youth/alcohol\\_youth.htm](http://www.marininstitute.org/Youth/alcohol_youth.htm)

<sup>304</sup> [www.suicide.org/suicide-statistics.html#2005](http://www.suicide.org/suicide-statistics.html#2005)

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

their use for our benefit is okay (food, clothing, etc.). After all, it was God Himself who made the first leather jackets for us in **Genesis 3.21**. It was Jesus who also said in **Matthew 6.26** that we are more valuable than the birds of the air.

Furthermore, as we should know that this is our home, and we were created to live here and live in these bodies, and will do so for all eternity. Yes, they will be refined and perfected, but it should cause us to look around the earth and appreciate its beauty and wonder.

## **A Final Thought on Forgiveness and Restoration**

Lastly, even as we go down the list of alarming facts, it is imperative that we know and remember that the cross of Christ has atoned for any of these particular stats that we may have been a part of. Our guilt has gone upon the shoulders of Christ for Him to bear. You are completely free and clear of any wrongdoing you may have committed, *and* you are washed of any guilt or shame that may have been put on you by sins committed against you.

If you are considering any of these particular actions or decisions, I urge you to investigate. Ask the hard, deep down questions. Look into the Word, ask a pastor or spiritual mentor that you trust that doesn't just have sound advice, but has sound biblical advice. Remember, *you were fearfully and wonderfully made, in His image!!!* You need nothing more than what you already have been given in Christ.

# PRACTICAL TOOLS

## ♣ Definition of Terms ♣

**Platonism:** Platonism is a philosophy built on the teachings of Plato. Plato believed that the material world was evil and that the spiritual world was good. Plato was a Greek philosopher, and his beliefs among the Greeks was substantial, and so therefore this particular influence was very normal in the early Christian churches, such as the church at Corinth. Through the years, others, such as Origen, passed along and kept alive some Platonic teachings.

**Dualism:** Dualism is in some ways the broad category that Platonism falls into. It is the general belief that there are two “natures” or “sides” that are in opposition with each other. In terms of creation, it would be the spiritual and physical. Real biblical theology, however, teaches that both the natural and physical, in its original form, was declared “good” by God. Therefore in our lives we can rest assured that enjoying physicality is not evil or sin, unless it is idolized or is already known as an actual sin. However if it is “neutral” or “secular,” we are free to enjoy it to the glory of God.

**Deism:** This is the erroneous belief that God simply “pushes the first domino” and sits back and watches events unfold. Though God indeed institutes “cause and effect,” natural laws (such as gravity) to orchestrate what and how things happen on earth, He is not simply watching and waiting, but He is upholding all things, declaring all things, ordaining all things, and planning all things. We will see more of this in coming chapters.

**Imago Dei:** This is a Latin term that means “image of God.” It is a term used to describe the fact that all human beings were made in God’s likeness. Though, of course, sin has shattered this image, there is some remnant of His image in our lives.

**Incommunicable and Communicable Attributes of God:** These are the various traits that we share with God (communicable) and will never share with God (incommunicable). The phrases simply mean that some, like having a moral character, can be commuted from God over to us. These are the distinctions that make us “in His image.” Others cannot be commuted, such as the following three “omni-attributes.”

**Omnipresence:** This is the ability to be anywhere and everywhere all at one time. This rightly describes God, that He is ever present, but this is not an attribute that man will ever or has ever had. Man is a physical image of God, complete with a Spirit, but God is a spirit and is not confined to a physical body.

**Omnipotence:** This is the ability to be all-powerful, and is also a God-only attribute. Man, despite our delusions, will never and has never been all-powerful. Man was indeed given dominion over creation, but omnipotence wasn’t part of the design.

**Omniscience:** This is the ability to know all. Only God will hold the knowledge and answers to everything. We know that He is not knowable in totality, and this is part of what makes God.

## Recommended Resources

### Theology Books

***Systematic Theology*** by Wayne Grudem. Chapters 15, 19-23, cover creation, angels, and the creation of man.

***Salvation Belongs to the Lord*** by John M. Frame. Chapter 7 on “Man, the Image of God.”

Also, Henry Morris has a number of various apologetic books on creation, the flood, etc.

### Books

***Heaven*** by Randy Alcorn. The best book about heaven. Though he doesn’t focus much on angels, there is some good reading pertaining to it.

***God, Marriage, and Family*** by Andreas Kostenberger. Described as being a book “without peer,” meaning that there is no other marriage and family focused Christian book that even compares to it. It’s about 350 pages and incredibly and highly recommended. If you are looking to strengthen your marriage and make it more God and Word centered, this is the book for you. Invest!

***Case for a Creator*** by Lee Strobel. This is a great little book full of apologetic answers to tough questions about creation. Great if you are or talk a lot with skeptics.

***Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*** by John Piper

***The Dangerous Duty of Delight*** by John Piper

***One Thing: Developing a Passion for the Beauty of God*** by Sam Storms

### Sermons

[www.christianessentialsbc.com/messages](http://www.christianessentialsbc.com/messages) This is Wayne Grudem’s sermons going through his book, *Systematic Theology*. Go to the sermons on Chapter 15, 19-23.

[www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). This is John Piper’s ministry. Along with audio or video sermons, he has the transcripts as well. Type “Image of God” in the search field and click on a few articles:

- “Male and Female He Created Them in the Image of God.” There is also an audio sermon along with the text.
- “Marriage: God’s Showcase of Covenant-Keeping Grace”
- “The Pleasure of God in His Creation”
- “What is Man?”

### Web Articles

[www.gty.org](http://www.gty.org). This is John MacArthur’s ministry. Type “marriage” as well as “image of God” and “creation” in the search engine for various articles.

[www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). This is John Piper’s ministry. Type in “creation” for these articles:

- “What We Believe About Creation”
- Also, you *must* go to this webpage and type “hedonism” or “hedonist” in the search engine. Read any articles that come up.

[www.carm.org](http://www.carm.org). This is a great site, especially for apologetics. Just go there and start snooping around, you’ll find plenty of great stuff to read on creation, evidences, etc.

[www.enjoyinggodministries.com](http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com). A great website for teacher Dr. Sam Storms. The main focus, in a nutshell, is on teaching us how to enjoy God (if you couldn’t figure that out yourself). Go here and click around, but under “Theological Studies,” select “Christian Hedonism” for a great article on God’s desire for us to seek and enjoy ourselves *in Him*.