



Humanity: Dignity, Depravity, & Destiny

Week 2 - 9/14/2025

Human Origins

The first two chapters of Genesis reveal that humans were created wonderfully by God. We learn that,

Human beings are the crown of God's creative handiwork.

- In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. With his final mighty act of creation God made humans in his image as the pinnacle of his good works, crowning them with glory and honor (Gen 1:27, 31; Ps 8:5).

Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:31 (ESV)

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Psalm 8:5 (ESV)

⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

- Beeke and Smalley, in their theology book, exclaim this, "Man is the climax and crown of creation, the centerpiece of God's eternal counsel, the image of God on earth...what a wonder man is!"¹
- Thus, the making of mankind is the "highpoint" of the story of creation because man is in God's image, a description shared by no other creature!

¹ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 2: Man and Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 131.

Genesis 1-2 reveals three truths about the origin of humans.

(1) Humans are created beings.

- As created beings, humans are dependent on God, made as male and female, and formed as very good (Gen 1:27; 31).
- Genesis chapters 1 and 2 display God as the creator and humans as created. Humans depend on God for life, breath, and everything else (Acts 17:25).
- Genesis 1:27 reveals humans are created beings as male and female. Directly from creation order itself, it is evident humans are sexed beings.
- This gendered quality is foundational to human identity and nature.
- Marriage is a natural outworking of this original design (Matt 19:4-6).

Genesis 2:21–25 (ESV)

²¹ 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. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ 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.” ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

- God created woman from man’s body to be his helper (Gen 2:21-23).
- They were united as one flesh in marriage establishing it as creation order (Gen 2:24-25).
- Genesis 1 teaches that humans as male and female are created as the climax of God’s “very good” creation (Gen 1:31).
- This happened before sin entered the world. The order is significant!
 - “sin does not belong to the essence of human nature.”²
- **Truth:** Sin has distorted the original design for humans, but it does not change foundational reality of humans as created very good.

(2) Humans are contingent beings.

- Genesis 1-2 also describes humans as **contingent** beings. Totally dependent.

² Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion According to the Reformed Confession* (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2020), 196.

- Many in our culture may assert they exist without God, as self-dependent beings.... but this does not change the fact that all humans, at all times, in all ages... will always be dependent on God.
- Bavinck again, “The moment God removed His hand and withheld His strength, the creature would sink back into nothingness.”³
- **Gen 2:7**,
“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature”
- Notice! Both **body formed from the earth and spirit as God’s breath** were divinely creative works.
- Thus humans are created complex, with both material and immaterial design.
- This is both, “formation and impartation.”⁴
 - By God’s design, body created (**formation**)
 - By God’s breath man became a living, spiritual being by a “second distinct act” displaying humans as created uniquely in God’s image. (**impartation**)

(3) Humans are commanded beings

- Humans are not only created and contingent beings but also **commanded** beings.
- Adam did not invent the commands but “God created them in him and communicated them to him...
- Adam was not to go his own way, but had to walk in the way God appointed for him.”⁵

So, what were the specific commands for humanity? Verses from Genesis.

- **Gen 1:28**,
“God said, “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion...** over every living thing that moves on the earth”
- **Gen 2:15**,
And God “took the man and put him into the garden **to work it and keep it.**”
- **Gen 2:16-17**,
“And the Lord commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat**, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die’”

³ Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, 160.

⁴ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 802–3.

⁵ Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, 199.

From these verses we learn **three truths** about humans as commanded beings:

1. The command of dominion signifies humans as **corulers (coregent)** with God as he installed us “as living, embodied representatives of his rule and reign.”⁶ (viceregents)
2. Humans are also commanded to procreate and fill the earth. They are to be **multipliers**.
 - This reflects God who creates, multiplies blessings.
3. Humans are also **caretakers** (Gen 2:16-17). Man was to take care of the garden by working it and keeping it. This caretaking task reveals God’s design for humanity as stewards of his creation and as beings created for vocation. So work is an aspect of God’s good design for man.

- God gives the command to **care for** creation but also **to take care!** Bavinck comments, “Man is told that he may not eat of that tree, and that on the day he eats of it he will die (Gen. 2:16-17). So to all that is commanded is now added one thing that is forbidden.”⁷

To summarize, the Bible reveals a good and glorious account of human origins.

- Humans are the **crowning achievement** of God’s creative handiwork.
 - Humans are **created** dependent on God, made as male and female, and fashioned as very good.
 - Humans are **contingent** beings, reliant on God for their every breath and for their complex yet unified makeup.
 - Finally, humans are **commanded** beings to serve God as corulers, multipliers, and caretakers of this world.

What does it mean to be made in the Image of God?

Key Text: Genesis 1:26–28 (ESV)

“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.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 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.”

⁶ Timothy C. Tennent, *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 9.

⁷ Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, 199.

Views of the Image of God

(1) Substantival

The substantival view defines the image of God as what a human **IS**, a unique quality such as reason or will.

(2) Functional

The functional view defines the image of God as something a person **DOES**, such as exerting dominion over creation. A clear command by God in Genesis.

(3) Relational

The relational view defines the image of God as the ability to **RELATE** with God and others. This sets us apart from other creatures.

(4) Teleological

The teleological view defines the image of God as what humans were created **FOR**, the goal or purpose of life. Live for God's glory, to give lives to Christ.

(5) Christological

The Christological view emphasizes Jesus Christ as the image of God on earth. He is who the theme points to - the fulfillment of the theme. He is the person we aspire to be like. Thus we need to focus on him, He the pinnacle of what it means to be made in God's image.

Image of God in the Storyline of Scripture

(1) Primary Image

Genesis 1:26-28

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 5:1-3

¹This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. ²Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. ³When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

(2) Polluted Image – sin enters the picture

Genesis 9:6

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”

James 3:9–12

⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

- Sin has now corrupted, there's death, murder, cursing of fellow humans.
- Yet not destroyed... distorted, corrupted by sin yes, but humans are all still defined by being “made in the likeness of God.”

(3) Progressing Image

Jesus Christ is the Perfect Image of God

John 14:9

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

- Also 2 Cor 4:4, “Christ, who is the image of God.”

Hebrews 1:3

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature”

- Jesus is the perfect image of God, as a human, worthy to be worshipped and emulated. He is the pattern for us as the image of the invisible God.

Those who trust in Christ are made “new creations.”

- They are declared righteous in God's sight, holy and blameless in their union with Christ.
- Yet we are still in the already, not yet times. We're already fully righteous in Christ but not yet fully perfect, we struggle with sin and are called to grow into Christ's image.
- And Christians grow by becoming more like him.

Image of Christ as our goal or purpose (progressing into His image as we grow)

Romans 8:29

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

2 Corinthians 3:18

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Colossians 3:9–10

“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

Ephesians 4:24

“and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

- God’s plan for us from the beginning, we are in the process of being conformed, transformed into Christ’s image, one degree of glory to another.
- We are to be active, put on, clothe ourselves with likeness of Christ by displaying practices – love, humility, kindness, purity, etc.

(4) Perfected Image – our future!

1 Corinthians 15:49

“Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

1 John 3:2

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

- We will be fully conformed to his likeness, free from sin and we will glorify and image him forever!

So when we define the image of God fully,

- We take into account the entire storyline of Scripture
- And it should be explained by a combination of the views.

Sermon – 9/15/2024 – Brandon Levering “The Sufficiency and Supremacy of Christ”
God’s vision for humanity in Creation.

“Humans are made for relationship, made for reflection, and made for representation. God’s vision for creation is to establish his kingdom through a people made in his image who relate to him as Father, reflect his character, and represent his rule on earth.”

My View: Holistic Ontological (essence)

- Each view captures an important aspect of the *imago Dei* but only provides a portion of its full tapestry.
- Humans are holistic beings.
- Thus, the *imago Dei* cannot be condensed to simply a characteristic, activity, or relationship. (these views are oversimplifications & reductionistic).
- Additionally, the image of God defines the very essence of what it means to be human.
- The characteristics, activities, and relationships of a human flow from this essence, but are not the essence itself.
- The *imago Dei* must be defined in terms of ontology, the metaphysical foundation of the actions, qualities, and relationships of a person.
- Essence/Ontology “does not stay still” (Strachan) active, purpose, moral, will. Essence/Ontology “issues forth an active relationship” with God and an ability to reflect God to others and in the world by exercising human capacities and functions while living out human *telos* in daily life.⁸

Two main branches to this view: Relating and Reflecting

- Man is the divine image (in his essence)
- It is important to analyze the meaning of “image” and “likeness” in Genesis 1:26 and its surrounding context.

(1) likenesses relate and (2) images reflect.

- Humans relate to God in a love relationship as *his likenesses*.
- Humans reflect who God is by loving others and ruling creation as *his images*. Since humans are God’s likeness they relate to him as “his sons.”⁹ Since humans are God’s image they relate to creation as viceregents – others call us “servant kings.” - corulers, dominion, under his authority.¹⁰

⁸ Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Fearn: Mentor, 2019), 31.

⁹ Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept*, vol. 1 (Brentwood, TN: B & H Academic, 2024), 407.

¹⁰ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 217.

My definition: Humans are ontologically the *imago Dei* created to relate with God and to reflect who he is in relationships and in creation.

So, how are we to relate to God?

1. Worship.

- A relationship characterized by love is the heart of relating with God as his likeness. Its purpose is to know God more intimately and it is to be displayed in love for God, which is the first and greatest commandment (Deut 6:4-5).
- Therefore, the outworking of the ontological foundation of the *imago Dei* is primarily expressed in relating to God as his likeness through loving him and glorifying his name (Matt 22:37-38). As people increasingly love and glorify God, they center themselves within the human purpose, to image God and glorify him forever (Isa 43:7).

And so, how are we to reflect, mirror God?

2. Discipleship

- Humanity was told to be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). The human task was to grow in number and to flourish in relationships among humanity. God's love displayed for people should be reflected while obeying this mandate.
- In the NT, multiplying our lives spiritually is the emphasis. Matt 28:18-20.

3. Stewardship

- When humans take dominion over the earth they reflect God in relationship with creation.
- Human beings are designed as stewards of the world as God's vice-regents, expanding the kingdom of God wherever they go.
- Reflecting God as the Lord in stewardship of creation requires elements of lording on earth.
- Reflecting a God who cares for creation by stewarding time, treasure, and talents for the glory of God and the good of the world.

In summary, the **Image of God** be described in terms of a **vine**.

- The vine is the ontological nature of humanity which provides foundation and nourishment.
- The two main branches are humans **relating** with God and **reflecting** who he is, which further branches to **reflecting him to others** and **reflecting him in creation**.
- The **fruit** of the vine is loving God in worship, loving others in multiplication, and loving creation through stewardship.
- Thus, the overflow of the ontological foundation of *imago Dei* is the fruit of,
(1) **worship** – relating with God in love,
(2) **discipleship** – reflecting love to others and spiritually reproducing by making disciples of all nations, and
(3) **stewardship** – reflecting a God who cares for creation by stewarding time, treasure, and talents for the glory of God and the good of the world.

Growth Project

- Read Genesis 3, Romans 3:9-20, and Romans 5:12-21. List all the consequences of sin. Then, write a summary paragraph describing sin and its consequences.