

Humanity

Fight the urge to fit in (part 3)

Summary: We believe that human persons are created in God's image and likeness but that all persons (except Jesus Christ) come into the world under the curse of sin and need redemption when they attain the age of accountability.

Scripture: Romans 12:1–2; Job 7:17–21

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Introduction

What & Why?

In this sermon series, the image of the chameleon, whose skin colour changes to reflect its surroundings, has reminded us to fight the urge to fit in with the spirit of this world.

Explanation

As we explore what is essential to believe for Christian faith and lifestyle, we started by looking at what we believe about Jesus, then about God. If it is true, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Pr 9:10), what we believe about Jesus and God provides the foundation for what we believe about anything at all.

Let us now turn our attention to our favourite subject: ourselves.

We believe that human persons are created in God's image and likeness but that all persons (except Jesus Christ) come into the world under the curse of sin and need redemption when they attain the age of accountability.

This statement tells us four things about humanity.

Humans Are Created in God's Image

The first thing we learn from this statement is **humans are created in God's image**.

As I mentioned in this week's *Deeper Dive*,¹ we need to let the Bible speak for itself **before** we start seeking to understand what it reveals. And what it reveals always has a context that is important for us to appreciate.

With the help of the Bible, we learn humans are created in God's image, most notably, in *The Book of Genesis*:

Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)²

It should go without saying, God did not just ‘snap his fingers’ and humankind ‘popped’ into existence. We were formed. We are an integral part of the physical creation.³

This means that, at least amongst all earthly creatures, we are the pinnacle of God's good creation. We were created for a purpose:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth." (Genesis 1:26–28)

This tells us humankind is made **in God's image**, yet the better way to phrase this is humankind was made to **bear** God's image, to **be** his image. We do this by filling the Earth and ruling over all the Earth.

The currency of a country bears the image of its sovereign, to remind that country's citizens of who is boss. A sovereign cannot be everywhere at once, so appoints representatives in his or her stead, to act as the sovereign and rule on his or her behalf.

In the case of God and his creation, he has appointed humans to represent him and rule on his behalf.

Australia's history bears a dark stain reflecting this principle.

Sir John Kerr became the Governor-General in Australia in 1974. As such, he was the representative of the Queen of our Commonwealth, chosen to act in and rule Australia on her behalf.

The Prime Minister of Australia at the time was Gough Whitlam, and his tenure in office proved highly turbulent and controversial. Whitlam was unable to break a deadlock between the House of Representatives and the Senate, so the Governor-General dismissed the Prime Minister. This event has been described as the greatest political and constitutional crisis in Australian history.⁴

Kerr did not merely sit in his Canberra mansion, Government House, and dress up like the Queen! He acted on her behalf and ruled this country by dismissing its Prime Minister and handing the responsibility of government to the Opposition Leader, Malcolm Fraser.

Humans are the Governor-Generals of Earth on behalf of our creator God! The psalmist described this well:

When I observe your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you set in place, what is a human being that you remember him, a son of man that you look after him? You made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all the sheep and oxen, as well as the animals in the wild, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea that pass through the currents of the seas. (Psalm 8:3–8)

This psalm reminds us we are partners with God, not in the original act of creating, but in the ongoing stewardship of the Earth and its creatures.⁵ Like a gardener, our responsibility is to care for and cultivate this Earth for the benefit of all humans and creatures.

This is what it means to be created in or bear or be God's image: we are to rule in the place of our Creator the territories to which we have each been assigned, for the purpose to which we have each been assigned (1Chr 4:10). We are not all called to be gardeners. Some of us are to be CEOs or financial planners, health professionals or teachers, project or warehouse managers, baggage handlers or baristas. Each of these are the territories we rule, so as to fulfil the purposes to which we have been assigned.

When it all works together, this Earth becomes the human dwelling place our Creator intended, **so rule your territory well!**

Humans Are Created in God's Likeness

To be God's image, we must act as he would. To know how our God would act, we must learn to think like he does which brings us to the next thing this statement teaches us:

Humans are created in God's likeness.

This is the document containing the family records of Adam. On the day that God created man, he made him in the likeness of God; he created them male and female. When they were created, he blessed them and called them mankind. (Genesis 5:1–2)⁶

Where bearing the image of God refers to our partnership with God in his works, bearing his likeness refers to resembling God's nature, which we can only do when our minds have been renewed, so that we may discern God's good, pleasing, and perfect will (Rom 12:1–2).

What might God's nature look like?

For the LORD your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awe-inspiring God, showing no partiality and taking no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving him food and clothing. You are also to love the resident alien, since you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:17–19)

We are show no partiality because God shows no partiality; we are to take no bribes because God does not take bribes; we are to execute justice and be compassionate, sharing our resources, because God has shown compassion to us.

Why? Because our Creator wants us to resemble Jesus.

For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (Romans 8:29)⁷

Through worship and service, our minds are being renewed so that we may discern God's will, and God's will is to transform us into the likeness of his Son, Jesus. What does that look like?

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22–23a)

To do the works God would do, we must think like God would think and act as Jesus would act, and he was full of the fruit of the Spirit!

That is what it means to be created in God's image and likeness.

Humans Are Under the Curse of Sin

The next thing this statement teaches is that **humans are under the curse of sin**.

What then? Are we any better off? Not at all! For we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin, as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one. (Romans 3:9–12)⁸

The fall of Adam and Eve is the ultimate symbol for the human condition. Granted to live in a beautiful paradise, they were too easily tempted to reject all of God's blessings for the self-centeredness of independence from the Creator.

We would rather stumble in the dark, heavy laden, than walk in the glorious freedom of the children of God! (Rom 8:20–21)

As a result of the Fall, human beings have become separated from God through sin, and are divided amongst each other. We are divided:

- individual against individual (Ge 4:3-9; Ro 1:28-29)
- man against woman (Ge 3:8-12,16; Pr 21:9)
- nation against nation (Ge 11:1-9; Mt 24:6-7)
- ethnic group against ethnic group (Ac 10:27-28; Eph 2:11-12)
- rich against poor (Am 8:4-6; Jas 2:1-7)

We are separated from one another because “the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar” (Gal 5:19-21a). In the pursuit of such, we cannot help but hurt each other because of our shared self-inflicted trauma, described by James,

Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death. (James 1:15)

When we come into the world, the curse of sin weighs heavy and we quickly give in to its allure, rejecting God's overtures of grace and generosity. We are each to blame, yet the curse of sin, and its effect on human culture and society, makes the situation almost as if we could not do otherwise.

All of us then are in a condition of spiritual blindness, slavery and death, and are incapable of saving ourselves from this situation.

Humans Need Redemption

A point which leads us then to the final thing this statement tells us, that **humans need redemption**.

Paul described this rather succinctly,

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?
(Romans 7:24)

When we recognise our spiritual blindness, our slavery to sin, and that we are under the curse of death, then, try as we might, we discover we are incapable of saving ourselves. We feel deep in our bones that we need to be rescued, restored, reconciled, and renewed, all of which is bound up in the biblical concept of redemption.

Redemption is the release of people, animals, or property from bondage through the payment of a price. For example,

If your brother becomes destitute and sells part of his property, his nearest relative may come and redeem what his brother has sold. (Leviticus 25:25)

God as redeemer is a prominent theme in the Bible. It was Job who said,

But I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the end he will stand on the dust. (Job 19:25)

Job understood God would rescue him from his suffering and trample on the death that threatened him.

Because of our sin, we are slaves and suffer the curse of death. We need a redeemer to rescue us and restore our freedom.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

Through Jesus Christ's death on the cross for our redemption, human beings are offered a salvation that will give us spiritual life and freedom, reconcile us to God, and unite us to one another as part of a new humanity.

If someone offered you a twenty-dollar note, would you take it? What if that person wadded up the note and threw it on the ground —would you still want it? What if he stepped on it, kicked it, and even spit on it? Could you still go to the shops and spend it?

The answer is yes. That note has value because of what it is, not because of how it looks, where it's been, or what it has been used for. A crisp, clean twenty-dollar note is worth the same amount as an ugly, old, abused one.

You may feel like you've been stepped on, beat up, or kicked around. You may feel dirty, unworthy, or useless. But be encouraged by the twenty-dollar note —no matter what you've been through, you still have value to God!⁹

Humanity was created by God to be his image and bear his likeness because we have a purpose on this Earth! When we reject our Creator, we fall under the curse of sin and need redemption, for we cannot save ourselves from the bondage we have submitted ourselves to.

Application

It is easy to feel despair at the human condition and our incapability to truly do anything about it. But that's not the end of the story.

The Queen Is Glorified in the Commonwealth Games

These past two weeks has seen Australian athletes dominate the 2022 Commonwealth Games held in Birmingham, England.

Australia ended the games in Birmingham leading the medal tally with 178 medals, including 67 gold, 57 silver and 54 bronze medals. Australia's medal total was closely followed by England on 176 and Canada on 92.

Just to stroke your ego a little more, since the first Commonwealth Games held in Canada in 1930, Australia has accrued a record 1,001 gold medals.

Whether gold, silver, or bronze, every medal is a win not only for that athlete but for all Australians everywhere. In a vicarious way, this country, with its values and culture, is glorified by the efforts of its athletes.

This can be seen especially in the story of Alex Winwood, an Australian Aboriginal boxer who was knocked out of the Games after a 'premature' stop to his flyweight bout against Zambia's Patrick Chinyemba.¹⁰

The 25-year-old had comfortably won the first round, but was knocked down in the second. After popping back up from the canvas, Winwood received only two counts from the ring official before the fight was called.

Winwood gave an emotional message after the fight, thanking his supporters "from the bottom my heart". He told Channel 7:

I really wanted to have a shot and prove myself. I know what I'm made of—I wanted to show Australia, and the world, what Australians are made of.

As an Indigenous Australian, I love you all, up the Aussies!

With all the fuss around Australia Day, I was very surprised this boxer expressed gratitude and gave the glory of his win to Australia. Good on 'im!

Ultimately, though, the glory of the athletes goes to the queen of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty Queen Elisabeth II. The Commonwealth Games are truly a win-win for her because every athlete is her subject. Even as the UK came in second in the medal tally, she can still revel in Australia's dominance because we too are her subjects.

It is not just those who win a medal who glorify the queen. Whether an athlete wins or loses, how they play the games is what matters. When an athlete puts all their effort into their chosen sport, they are to be commended, and that is the effort that inspires the armchair-athletes to 'get up and have a go'.

But when an athlete cheats—as did Australian swimmer Isaac Cooper, sent home for disciplinary reasons "following some wellbeing challenges, including the use of medication"¹¹—or when a group boycotts the games—as the National Rifle Association of India threatened over the removal of shooting from the Games¹²—to cheat or boycott is to remove themselves from the games and from the glory. By cheating or boycotting, an athlete denies themselves any glory for the sake of denying glory to the queen or any one else.

God Is Glorified in Hum an Life

In a similar way, God our sovereign creator is glorified by our faith and lifestyle. When we place our faith in Jesus, our glory is his glory; when we follow the rules, our glory is his glory; when we achieve, our glory is his glory; when we persevere in the midst of temptations and trials, our glory is his glory.

God is glorified when he is in our living with us, if we will let him.

The church father Irenaeus put it this way: "The glory of God is [a human person] fully alive, and the life of [such a person] is the vision of God. *If the revelation of God through creation already brings life to all living beings on the earth, how much more will the manifestation of the Father by the Word bring life to those who see God*". It's true, God is never more glorified than when a human being comes fully alive. It's not in sunsets and oceans. It's not in mountain grandeur and stellar blaze. It's in people.¹³

God's eternal purpose, all along, was that we not go through life alone, but hand in hand with our Creator.

Playing sports may or may not be the will of God, yet it reflects his glory when we perform at our best, athletically and morally.

In the 1981 historical sports drama film, *Chariots Of Fire*, the Olympic runner, Eric Liddell, explains, "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast! And when I run I feel his pleasure."

The film is a dramatisation of the Christian runner's life. This expression of feeling a sense of purpose AND God's pleasure does capture the sense of a human being fully alive, and operating at the height of their skills and capacities. And yet, Liddell did not say this.

In fact, more than anything else, Eric Liddell believed, "God made me for China".¹⁴

When Eric Liddell, "the Flying Scot", won the 400 metre race and the gold medal at the 1924 games in Paris, there was no awards ceremony. Back then, the medals were engraved after the games and mailed in a simple package to the victors. But even without the medal ceremony, there was glory. Liddell instantly became a hero to the entire United Kingdom and was recognised as one of the greatest athletes of his age.

What you may not know is Liddell was the favourite for the 100 m race, but because the 100 m was scheduled for a Sunday, Liddell switched to the 400 m race. Despite not being considered a contender, he ran into the history books by winning, becoming one of the most famous men in the British Empire and the larger world of athletics.

The film ends with these words in text: "Eric Liddell, missionary, died in occupied China at the end of World War II. All of Scotland mourned."

Liddell was undoubtedly made to run, and likely felt God's pleasure when he did so, but he truly felt his purpose from God was for China, to share there the good news about Jesus and to serve the Chinese people.

Liddell died in China after serving God and the people there faithfully.

Fulfilling Our Purpose

Men and women, boys and girls, were created for a purpose, to fill the Earth and rule it. We can take this language negatively or we can see in it the intention of God for humans to spread around the world, cultivate its resources, make this Earth a human dwelling place, to the benefit of all creatures everywhere.

When we are in tune with God's purpose for us we are fully alive. Rejecting God's purpose and his will and his way has led the human condition to be characterised by spiritual blindness, slavery to sin, the curse of death, and we are incapable of saving ourselves.

Conclusion

Thanks be to God that through Jesus Christ's death on the cross and his redemption, you are offered a salvation that will give you spiritual life and freedom, reconcile you to God, and unite us to one another as part of a new humanity.

Will you admit your pursuit of self-actualisation through fame, fortune, beauty, and strength, etc, has done nothing to pacify your deep need to be rescued, restored, reconciled, and renewed? Humanity was created by God to be his image and bear his likeness because we have a purpose on this Earth! Pursue that purpose, become fully alive, and give glory to God.

Endnotes

- 1 Ian Forest-Jones, "On The Omniscience of God", 10-Aug-2022, <https://bit.ly/3bMTRWL> (accessed 10-Aug-2022).
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 3 See also Ge 3:17-19; Job 10:8-9; Ps 103:13-14.
- 4 For more information, see "1975 Australian constitutional crisis", *Wikipedia*, <https://bit.ly/3zHT55B> (accessed 9-Aug-2022).
- 5 See also Ge 2:15; 9:1-3; Ps 8:3-8; Heb 2:5-8.
- 6 See also Ge 1:26-27; 9:6; Col 3:9-10; Jas 3:9.
- 7 See also 2Co 3:18; Eph 1:13-14; 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10.
- 8 See also Ps 14:1-3; Ge 6:5-13; Job 15:14-16; Ecc 7:20; Ro 1:18-32; Rev 18:1-5.
- 9 Mike Silva, *Would You Like Fries with That?* (Word, 2005); quoted in Craig Brian Larson and Phyllis Ten Elshof, *1001 Illustrations That Connect* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008), pg 192.
- 10 Jonah Johnson, "Noongar boxer out of Commonwealth Games following 'outrageous' ref call", *NITV*, 5-Aug-2022, <https://bit.ly/3Qf8Ibr> (accessed 11-Aug-2022).
- 11 Tiffanie Turnbull, "Commonwealth Games: Australian swimmer Isaac Cooper ruled out over 'use of medication'", *BBC News*, 20-Jul-2022, <https://bbc.in/3p1zmZm> (accessed 5-Aug-2022).
- 12 "Concerns and controversies at the 2022 Commonwealth Games", *Wikipedia*, <https://bit.ly/3QeFtpa> (accessed 5-Aug-2022).
- 13 Ben Patterson and David L. Goetz, *Deepening Your Conversation with God*, vol. 7, The Pastor's Soul Series (Minneapolis, MN, USA: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), pg 87; italicised text added to complete the quote from Irenaeus, "Against Heresies", book IV, ch 20, line 7.
- 14 Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr., "'God made me for China': Eric Liddell, beyond Olympic glory", *The Washington Times*, 29-Nov-2017, <https://bit.ly/3QzCaJ5> (accessed 11-Aug-2022).