

The Doctrine of Man

What is man? Simply the “outcome of accidental collocations of atoms”?¹ The highest evolutionary stage to date of the primate? Is he among world species primarily *homo sapiens*? According to the Bible, none of these popular current ideas captures what man is *essentially*. Rather, man is a *creature* of God, indeed, the crowning work of God’s creative activity; uniquely the “image of God” with whom God has entered into covenant, and as a covenant creature man is accordingly *homo religiosus* before he is *homo sapiens*.²

Having looked at God’s glory in His creation of the universe and of the angelic realm, we now turn to focus on the pinnacle of His creative activity, His creation of human beings, both male and female, to be more like Him than anything else He has made.

Why did God Create Humans?

Simply put, God did not need to create man, yet He created us for His own glory.³ When we looked at God’s attributes, we noted that God needs nothing. He is both self-existing and self-sufficient. He is completely independent. Nothing can be added to God, and nothing can be taken away from God.

If God as Trinity needs nothing, then why did He create anything? The answer, according to Jonathan Edwards, and, more importantly, according to Scripture, is love. The Bible says that “God is love” (1 John 4:16). And Scripture teaches that the primary attribute of *agapē* love is the giving of one’s self for the good of another. Using Edwards’ analogy, creation is simply the “spilling over” of God’s glory and love within the Trinity. Love loves to share one’s best with others. And so out of love, the true and Triune God created all things to display His glory to others, with the effect that they should be eternally and joyfully satisfied in God. Edwards’ argument is that the ultimate end of the supreme being in the works of

¹ Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” in *Why I am not a Christian*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 107.

² Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 415-16.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 440.

creation and providence is the manifestation of His own glory in the highest happiness of His own creatures.⁴

Unlike the false god of Islam (or the false gods of other other false religions), wherein their diminutive 'deity' was lonely all by himself and in desperate need of company (as well as someone to be angry with), the true God created all things out of the overflow of His glorious love.

- According to Isaiah 43:7, we are created for God's glory, which is all a part of the Triune God's eternally wise counsel and will (cf. Eph. 1:11).

As Wayne Grudem notes, this truth has great implications for us.

First, this fact guarantees that our lives are significant. One might initially conclude that since God does not need us for anything, our lives have no importance at all. But since God created us for His glory, we have eternal importance imputed to us.

Second, the fact that God created us for His own glory answers the plaguing question, "What is the purpose of my life?" This is nicely summarized in the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: Q – *What is the chief end of man?* A – *Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

When we realize that God created us to glorify Him, and when we start to act in ways that fulfill that purpose (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31), then we begin to experience an intensity of joy in the Lord that is impossible to find elsewhere (cf. Psa. 16:11; 73:25-26; 84:1-2, 10; 1 Pet. 1:8).⁵

Man as the Zenith of Creation

⁴ Sereno Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. clxiii. In Edwards' own words, "Because [God] infinitely values His own glory, consisting in the knowledge of Himself, love to Himself, complacence and joy in Himself; He therefore valued the image, communication or participation of these, in the creature. And it is because He values Himself, that He delights in the knowledge, and love, and joy of the creature; as being Himself the object of this knowledge, love and complacence...[Thus] God's respect to the creature's good, and His respect to Himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at, is happiness in union with Himself." In, *The End for Which God Created the World*, section 278.

⁵ Cf. Grudem, *ST*, 441-42.

Out of all the creatures God made, only one creature, man, is said to be made “in the image of God.” Thus, the biblical witness is that man occupies a position of the very highest significance in the creation order, as shown in the Genesis narrative (read Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:5-25). Reymond points out eight significant takeaways:

1. Man’s creation occurs as the last major event of the sixth day of the creation week, as the climax of God’s activity. Clearly, God intended all that He had done prior to man’s creation to be preparatory to the creation of man.
2. The very pattern of expression introducing the details of the consecutive acts of creation – quite uniform until the account reaches the creation of man – undergoes a noticeable change at 1:26. Instead of the “And God said, ‘Let there be’” formula (1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24), we are confronted with the new expression, “And God said, ‘Let us make man’” – suggesting a pause in the divine activity for the purpose of solemn divine counsel.
3. It is man alone who is described as having been created in the image of God.
4. Man alone is granted dominion over God’s creation as God’s viceregent. In David’s inspired commentary on Gen. 1-2, he says that God views man as His ‘crowning’ act in creation (see Psalm 8).
5. The creation of man receives special attention in Gen. 2:5-25, which is not a ‘second account’ of creation differing in many details from the account in Genesis 1. Rather, it is a more detailed account of God’s creative activities on day six of Genesis 1. Genesis 1 as it were gives an overview of the creation week *as a whole*, then concentrates in Genesis 2 on the creation of man.
6. Man is distinguished from animals in a very special way in Genesis 2. Not only is he made their ruler in the Genesis 1 narrative, but also into man’s nostrils alone does God breathe the breath [נְשָׁמָה, *n^eshamah*] of life (2:7). This word for breath refers to more than the impartation of mere physical

life, which all animals equally possess. Unlike animals, man has a “soul,” and he thus has a conscience, as well as the ability to comprehend and fellowship with his Creator.

7. It is to man that God gives the capacity of rational speech. It is to man that God Himself speaks, thereby ennobling him and honoring him above the animals.
8. Finally, it is with man that God enters into covenant.⁶

Man as Created in God’s Image

As John Frame notes, theologians have long puzzled over what exactly ‘the image of God’ consists of. Some have referred it to man’s unique intellectual power, others to the soul as distinct from the body, others to man’s ability to have a relationship with God. Karl Barth suggests a parallel between ‘image’ and ‘male and female’, arguing that man is unique with regard to his social relationships. More recently, many scholars see ‘image’ to refer to man’s dominion over the rest of creation (i.e. Gen. 1:28 ‘unpacks’ 1:26), mirroring and reflecting God’s own lordship over all things. Still others, with NT justification, have identified this image with ethical qualities such as knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (see Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).⁷

There is truth in all these representations. In an attempt to succinctly summarize them into a unifying concept, Frame says, “The image of God consists of those qualities that equip man to be lord of the world, under God.”⁸

From a careful comparison of Gen. 1:26 with 5:3, Grudem understands the image of God to “mean that man is like God and represents God.”⁹ In 5:3, Moses uses the exact same Hebrew words for “likeness” (דְּמוּת, *dēmût*) and “image” (צֶלֶם),

⁶ Reymond notes that though the Hebrew word for “covenant” (בְּרִית, *b’rith*) does not occur until Genesis 6:18, (I) the elements of a covenant between God and man are present in Gen. 1-2 (two parties, a condition laid down, blessings for obedience, cursing for disobedience) and (II) Hosea 6:7 clearly speaks of a covenant God made with Adam). For a fuller biblical treatment of this “covenant of creation”, see *Kingdom through Covenant*, by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, or their abridged *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*.

⁷ Cf. John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburgh: P & R, 2013), 784-85.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 786.

⁹ Grudem, *ST*, 442.

tselem) used in 1:26. Seth was not Adam or even identical to Adam; but he was like him in many ways, and ‘represented’ him in so far as ‘carrying his name.’ Grudem warns against over-speculating about what exactly it was that Seth “imaged” Adam, and that we need to be careful in being overly dogmatic about what it means to “image” God as human beings.

Man as God’s Son

Another pervasive biblical model of man’s relationship to God is that of sonship. In Luke’s genealogy, Adam is “the son of God” (3:38). Israel is also called God’s son (Deut. 1:31; 8:5; Hos. 1:10). Jesus is the eternal Son, the Son who succeeds to His Father’s throne (Matt. 14:33; 16:16; 27:54). In and through Christ, believers are redeemed from sin to be adopted as God’s sons (Rom. 8:14, 16, 19; Gal. 4:1-4; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 12:7; 1 John 3:1-2).

The content of sonship is very similar to that of image. The son resembles his father as the image resembles the thing it reflects. In the Hebrew idiom, to say that someone is “son of” something is to say that it has the same characteristics (e.g. Mark 3:17; Acts 4:36; Eph. 2:2; 5:6, etc.). A son of God is someone who thus resembles God, who is like God.

Sonship also entails royal qualities. Like kings, sons of God have power, authority, and presence within their domains.¹⁰ As Frame points out, through the figures of “image” and “son”, God made man to be His covenant servant, His vassal king, and sons within His family.¹¹

Male and Female

¹⁰ In fact, the Bible often equates Israel’s “king” with God’s “son” (e.g. 2 Sam. 7:14; Psa. 2:6, 12, etc.). For a fuller treatment, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, especially their treatment of the Davidic covenant.

¹¹ Frame, *ST*, 791-92.