

Biblical Anthropology

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion”
(Genesis 1:26 ESV)*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in
place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
(Psalm 8:3-4 ESV)*

Let Us Make Man
January 21st, 2024
Genesis 1:1-31
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Genesis 1:1; that’s on page 1 in your pew Bibles. This morning we are starting a new series called “Biblical Anthropology”. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this topic. John Calvin in the introduction to the Institutes says:

“Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”¹

There is nothing more important than thinking about these two things – and specifically, thinking about these two things in relation to each other. That’s what we see King David doing in Psalm 8 when he says:

1 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

2 Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), paragraph 221.

4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:1-4 ESV)

All wise living begins with thinking about God, thinking about the universe and wondering who we are and how we fit in to that picture and that's exactly what we are going to be doing over the course of this series. It's an important topic, and it is a relevant topic as well, given some of things that are going on right now in the wider culture. Carl Trueman writing just a few months ago over at First Things said that:

“As the fourth century wrestled with the doctrine of God, the fifth with Christology and the nature of God’s grace, and the Reformation era with sacraments and salvation, so our age wrestles with the question of anthropology. What does it mean to be human? More specifically, what does it mean to be an embodied human? For we now find ourselves not so much in a battle for the Bible but in a battle for the body.”²

We're all feeling that, aren't we?

It's hard to turn on the TV or the internet – for crying out loud, it's hard to take a walk in the mall without becoming increasingly aware of that. This is the issue of our time and so we're going to take a deep dive. We're going to walk long and slow through the Bible so that we can come to some kind of an understanding as to who we are in relation to God, who we are in relation to each other and who we are in relation to the world. This morning we are going to begin at the very beginning. Hopefully you have your Bibles open to Genesis 1:1; hear now the Word of the Lord.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 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.

3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7 And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

² <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2023/09/the-battle-for-the-body>

9 And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. 16 And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

20 And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” 21 So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. 25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

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.”

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

28 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.” 29 And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30

And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 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. (Genesis 1:1-31 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

That is a long chapter and we’re going to come back to it a few times over the course of this series, but this morning I want to consider this picture as a whole while also zooming in on the first part of verse 26; let me read that to you again:

Then God said, “Let us make man (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

We are going to talk NEXT WEEK about what it means for us to be created IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD – but before we get there, we need to think about what it means for us TO BE CREATED. I told you we were taking a deep dive here. We’ll get to IMAGE AND LIKENESS, but before that we need to talk about what it means to be CREATED.

That right there is the beginning of it all.

To be a human being, according to Genesis 1, is to be SPECIAL – the creation of human beings is clearly the climax of this chapter – so we are SPECIAL – but we are also clearly SECONDARY. In the beginning – GOD! And we – special as we are – come after that.

So what are the implications of that?

That’s the question I want to wrestle with today.

What are the implications of the fact that we are HUMANS created by GOD?

I think the first implication is fairly obvious. The fact that we are HUMANS created by GOD means that:

1. We have enormous dignity and worth

The arrangement and structure of Genesis 1 as a WHOLE is making that point. We are not just another animal in the zoo, we are the CLIMAX of God's creative work and activity. That's why we read the whole chapter, and not just the first part of first 26. When you read the whole chapter you notice that the creation of human beings is marked out as SPECIAL. In the first part of the chapter it is as though God is assembling the SET, you might say, and so he simply SPEAKS everything into being. He says:

“Let there be light,” and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 ESV)

He says:

“Let the earth sprout vegetation ...” And it was so. (Genesis 1:11 ESV)

But when it comes time to create human beings, the entire narrative slows down and zooms in. Look at verse 26 again:

Then God said, “Let us make man (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

“Let us make” as opposed to “let there be”. Instead of just speaking things into being, all of the sudden, God is taking counsel within himself. These clues in the narrative are given, Calvin says:

“for the purpose of commending to our attention the dignity of our nature”³

Human beings MATTER TO GOD! To be clear – EVERY human being matters to God! The Bible says that all human beings have a common ancestor and therefore a common dignity. There is no race of people, no ethnic group, of less value than any other. We all have breathtaking value and dignity – whether in the womb or whether on death's door – whether you have an IQ of 150 or 85, whether you are tall or short, whether you are rich or poor, whether you are famous or

³John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 185.

unheralded, whether your video gets 1 million views on TikTok or only 24 – it doesn't MATTER what anyone else says or thinks about you – we ALL, by nature of our origin and identity, have inestimable worth in the eyes of God.

Young people in particular, you need to BUILD your life on that truth!

That is the first and arguably most important implication of the teaching in this text, but as you might imagine there are more. Because we are HUMANS CREATED by GOD, it ought to go without saying that:

2. We do not determine reality

When we read Genesis 1 we notice that human beings are created within a pre-existing world. They do not MAKE reality, they INHABIT reality. For most of human history that point probably didn't need to be made; for most of human history reality was overwhelming. You could smell reality as soon as you stepped out the door. Our great great grandparents usually had an inch and a half of sheep manure on the bottom of their shoes. They were literally GROUNDED in reality – but in the 21st century, because of the internet, an increasing number of us are not.

The internet has changed the way human beings think about reality – and their relationship to reality. Think about the difference between the internet and the television. The television which was the dominant technology for Baby Boomers provided a passive interaction with the world outside. TV SHOWED US what was going on. Newscasters curated the information that was shared with us. They produced it, we received it. People raised on that technology interact with the world in a particular way, but the internet has changed all of us from content consumers into content creators. Why watch “Saving Private Ryan” when you can play “Call of Duty”? Why read a magazine when you can publish your own content on Facebook or Instagram? Why watch a show when you can BE THE SHOW on YouTube or Tiktok? We are producers and programmers now and that has changed the way we think about the world. Samuel D. James talks about that in his book Digital Liturgies; he says:

“The digital liturgies of the web and social media train us to invest ultimate authority in our own stories and experiences as they separate us from the objective givenness of the embodied world.”⁴

That’s a profound statement. He’s saying that, as we spend our days customizing our avatars and curating our pages and editing our selfies, our brains are being rewired to think of ourselves as **CREATORS OF A REALITY** as opposed to **INHABITORS OF A REALITY**.

We have begun to think of ourselves as **GAME MASTERS**. We think we are Neo manipulating the Matrix - when in fact, we are not. Because in this world, that we actually live in, **REALITY EXISTS. BIOLOGY EXISTS. BOUNDARIES EXIST. NATURAL LAWS EXIST**, irrespective of our opinions and preferences.

You see, you can give yourself a set of **WINGS** on your digital avatar but that doesn’t mean you can actually fly. **GRAVITY EXISTS** and people who start living as if it doesn’t exist, end up in a coma. Samuel James goes on to say that:

“Christian wisdom is about living a life that responds correctly to reality.”⁵

Realities like: there are only two sexes; male and female.

Realities like: you can only borrow money for so long before you go bankrupt.

Realities like: the early bird does get the worm and a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

That kind of reality!

According to Genesis 1, human beings live in a world **FILLED** with **GIVEN** realities. There are lines, laws and limitations that **EXIST** whether we approve of them or not and therefore, living

⁴ Samuel D. James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 10.

⁵ Samuel D. James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 20.

well and wisely in this world requires us to acknowledge these facts and to conduct ourselves accordingly.

Thirdly, the fact that we are PERSONS created by GOD implies that we have a pre-existing purpose.

3. We have a pre-existing purpose

In the same that we do not DEFINE our reality, according to the Bible, neither do we DISCOVER our purpose - we were created with a purpose. The Bible says that were created both BY and FOR GOD. Genesis 1:26 says:

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.” (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

We’ll talk more extensively about this next week, but in the simplest terms, for humans to be made in the image and likeness of God means that, in some way, they are to resemble and represent God within creation. Human beings were meant to be MIRRORS, reflecting the glory of God as we move and multiply across the face of the earth.

Of course, as FALLEN human beings, our mirrors are CRACKED. The only perfect human reflection of God has been given by the person of Jesus Christ, which is why Jesus said to Philip:

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9 ESV)

But the good news is that, when we come to Christ – when we are converted and filled with the Holy Spirit – our mirror begins to HEAL such that we begin to reflect God’s glory as well. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18 says:

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. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

Now, just for fun, if you have an ESV Bible in front of you there should be a text note here right after the phrase “beholding the glory of the Lord”. If you follow that down to the bottom of your Bible it should say, “or reflecting the glory of the Lord.” The Apostle Paul is being crafty here. The phrase he uses can be translated either way – because both SENSES are part of the process. The more we BEHOLD CHRIST, the better we REFLECT CHRIST within creation – as we were created and intended to do in the beginning.

That’s your purpose! That’s been your purpose since the beginning of time. As a human being you don’t CHOOSE your purpose – you were CREATED with a purpose! Your purpose is to RESEMBLE and REPRESENT GOD wherever you find yourself in this world – that’s why Paul said to a bunch of people wondering what God’s will was for their lives:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor ... For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 ESV)

You want to know what God’s purpose is for your life? That you start looking more like him! That you stop behaving like an animal and you start behaving like the son or daughter of God that you are.

He wants you to SHINE!

That’s your calling right there! Now in the grace that he supplies, go and do it.

Fourthly, the fact that we are PERSONS created by GOD implies that we are morally responsible.

4. We are morally responsible

To be morally responsible means to be free – at least to some degree – and to be accountable. Anthony Hoekema puts it this way, he says:

“Man is not only a creature, however; he is also a person. And to be a person means to have a kind of independence – not absolute but relative. To be a person means to be able to make decisions, to set goals, and to move in the direction of those goals. It means to possess freedom – at least in the sense of being able to make one’s own choices.”⁶

Ok, so to be a human being means that we have a kind of freedom and independence – not absolute but relative. We are FREE but susceptible to influence. That’s how we were designed. We were CREATED to be INFLUENCED by God – as we interacted with him, we would be GROW and IMPROVE – so we are LEARNING and CHANGING creatures. However, being susceptible to influence and being capable of change is a double edged sword, as we will see in a couple of weeks. The devil can hack into our input ports. He can whisper. He can make suggestions and we are FREE to act upon that influence, with disastrous consequences.

That’s the human condition! We’re not squirrels! Squirrels are going to squirrel. The devil can whisper in a squirrel’s ear – and all the squirrel is going to hear is “Nuts are good. I should go get some nuts.” The squirrel does what the squirrel does. He is not a FREE and OPEN ENDED creature in any sense.

But we are!

With all the attendant opportunities and dangers that represents. This is why the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians:

Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” (1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV)

Human beings are FREE but also SUBJECT TO INFLUENCE. Those influences can come from the outside AND from the inside. Our desires can become INFLAMED. Our instincts can become confused. Therefore, we need to be very concerned about our influences BECAUSE our influences affect our thoughts, actions and behaviours, FOR WHICH we will be held accountable. As Jesus reminded his disciples:

⁶ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created In God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 5.

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak (Matthew 12:36 ESV)

Moral responsibility is a wonderful truth and a terrifying truth all at the same time. But this is who we ARE and we need to know that.

Fifthly, the fact that we are HUMANS created by GOD means that we are dependent.

5. We are dependent

Again, to be a human being is to be a MIRROR. We were created to SEE something and to SHINE that something all over the earth, so in a sense, we are like solar powered vehicles. Imagine a car with a solar panel strapped to its roof. As long as some kind of connection is maintain between the panel and the sun, we ought to be able to fulfill our function.

But what if the solar panel is covered in mud?

What if the sun is hidden by a cloud?

If either of those things happen, or if both of those things happen, then our capacity is going to be dramatically affected. That is the human condition. Human beings cannot be understood apart from their unique connection to God. It is uniquely our ability to commune with God and to receive from God that LIFTS us above the other animals – so when that communication is IMPAIRED, we descend and diminish in our capacity, which is what we see happening in Genesis 3. In Genesis 3, after the first humans rebel, they are driven out of the Garden and the way back is BLOCKED by some kind of supernatural barrier; Genesis 3:24 says:

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24 ESV)

That's a symbolic way of saying that our communion with God is now disrupted leaving us greatly diminished in terms of our capacity and function. We are not who we should be and we

can't do much of what we should do. A solar powered car in a world covered in shadow is just a paper weight – unless it can be restored and recharged by God.

And that leads us to our final implication. The fact that we are PERSONS created by GOD implies that:

6. We need to be saved and restored by God

AND that we CAN be saved and restored by God. He created us in the beginning and he can RECREATE us at any time and in any way that he chooses and the way that he has chosen to save and restore us is through the person and work of Christ.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15 ESV)

God saves us by SHOWING US what a human being is supposed to like. God saves us by doing for us what we failed to do for ourselves. In Christ humanity has obeyed God. In Christ a death has been given that pays for our failure to obey God. In Christ the holiness, goodness and beauty of God have been EMBODIED. And so if we confess our sins and put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, our sins will be forgiven, our rebellion will be forgotten, our hearts will be healed by the gift of his Holy Spirit and our future will be restored and restarted.

That is how God lifts us out of the depths to which we have fallen. That is how God restores to us the dignity and majesty of our original identity and calling. That is the story of redemption! That is the Gospel!

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36 ESV)

Thanks be to God! Will you pray with me?