

# Hot Topics

If I Was Born This Way, How Can It Be a Sin?

*Psalm 119:49, 50*

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*Psalm 119:49, 50*

**Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope. <sup>50</sup> This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life (Psalm 119:49, 50).**

## Introduction

On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024, our president made a proclamation that March 31, 2024, be “Transgender Day of Visibility.” Along with that proclamation came a moral imperative that violence and discrimination “based on gender identity” be eliminated. He then used the antiquated, yet legitimate method of dating, setting his hand to this “in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-four.”<sup>1</sup>

He, furthermore, sent (on X) what he called “a simple message” to the aforementioned community telling them, “I see you.” This was followed by a religious affirmation, announcing that they are “made in the image of God” and “worthy of respect and dignity.”<sup>2</sup>

Much can be said regarding this action on the president’s part. Was it calculated that this day would coincide with Easter Sunday? Was there a reason for that? In the using of the dating method, “year of our Lord” is the president acknowledging the Lordship of Christ? If so, what does that look like in real time and space?

For the sake of this current message, I would like to dial in to his use of the phrase, “made in the image of God” and its implication, “worthy of respect and dignity.” It has been my experience that there is a great deal of confusion when it comes to this. The specific question I wish to ask and answer this morning is, *If I Was Born This Way, How Can It Be a Sin?* Did God, as some cynically ask, make a mistake at my birth?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2024/03/29/a-proclamation-on-transgender-day-of-visibility-2024/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://twitter.com/POTUS/status/1774511985700352189>

## **Image of God**

First, let us acknowledge the truth of the statement that all people, all humans, regardless of moral, social, economic, ethnic, intellectual, familial or national status are made in the image of God. The great crime of murder is deemed reprehensible and worthy of capital punishment because the victim is made in the image of God.

**Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed;  
For in the image of God He made man (Genesis 9:6).**

The unjust killing of another human is an affront to God, because you are murdering someone made in His image. The ninth chapter of Genesis is well after the fall of man, so we must conclude that even after sin entered the world, man remains made in the image of God.

I do pray that in our discussions revolving around human behavior, we never lose sight of the biblical fact that those with whom we might disagree are made in the image of God. They may not think that. They may reject the whole idea of God. But we should not.

So, the president does not err when he speaks of all people being made in the image of God. And there is certainly some kernel of truth when he adds the moral imperative of "respect and dignity." I say kernel of truth because it depends on what he means by that. If he means we should speak respectfully, acknowledging the value of the humanness of that person to whom we are speaking, I do hope we would all affirm.

Regardless of how foul we might find human behavior, there is an overarching, biblical method which should never be ignored.

**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good  
(Romans 12:21).**

**But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those  
who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who  
abuse you (Luke 6:27, 28).**

This is a difficult art in life we should seek to master.

**Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who  
rules his spirit than he who takes a city (Proverbs 16:32).**

There is no doubt a place for righteous indignation (Ephesians 4:26; Psalm 4:4). Yet our anger should not proceed from our own flesh. If so, we have engaged the same machinery as those by whom we have been offended. A righteous anger comes when we recognized the attack upon the glory and honor of God.

With this disposition ever in the foreground (and not the background), it would appear the presidents use of the language “respect and dignity” somehow folds into the conclusion that since someone is made in the image of God, their behavior (whatever that behavior might be) should be viewed as dignified and respected. But, of course, nobody operates that way. Nor should they.

If it can be shown that at birth a person (whether genetic or environmental) has an undeniable and almost unquenchable disposition toward violence, womanizing, theft, anger, self-destruction, dishonesty, racism, drug use, etc., does that legitimize the behavior? If this is the means by which we determine ethics or morality,<sup>3</sup> why even have a discussion.

A person may very well argue that they, at birth, were bequeathed with hatred and intolerance for anyone unlike them. Now ethics is reduced to table-pounding and *might makes right*, which sadly often happens at both personal and national levels.

How does this speak to being made in the image of God? It must be recognized that humans, though not losing the image of God in the fall of man, have an image that has been defaced. This includes every last one of us. Think of a museum where a bomb has exploded. As you walk through it, you see the beauty but also recognized that it has been marred.

The sunsets are often beautiful due to smog. A lush grassy hill folds into a cemetery. A lovely melody is accompanied by obscene lyrics. Undeniably talented and attractive entertainers bathe their skills in the murky waters of that which is an offense to God and destructive to their neighbor.

Even this presidential proclamation coupling appeals to God, respect and dignity to that which the Bible teaches will close the door to the inheritance of the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9) is evidence of the darkness of the fall. Keep in mind that in the fall, Adam did not become inhuman, but he did seek alternative methods to hide his shame.

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<sup>3</sup> Morality is often viewed as more personal, where ethics relates to the standards of a society or the ethos of a culture.

Though humanity did not lose the image of God, the image remaining is stained with corruption and needs to be repaired. This is why Paul will write,

**For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (Romans 8:29a).**

Succinctly put, that I am born a certain way does not justify or legitimize behavior. Genetics does not determine morality. Morality must be more transcendent.

### **How Then Should We Live?**

If being made in the image of God is insufficient for determining right and wrong, how are ethics determined? How do we answer questions of ethics and morality? This turns out to be a very difficult question. And in a society that is seeking to rescue the equations of human morality from the Word of God, I'm tempted to say the silence has been deafening, but it might better be said that the folly is loud and tempestuous.

Moral indignance is at an all-time high but moral legitimacy, in a land that was once filled, maybe not quite to the brim, has been reduced to sediment. But the moral sediment flails, as if it were a healthy brew. To paraphrase Thomas Sowell, 'even those who hate the morality of the west (largely a Christian morality), express that hatred in a western (biblical) language. And denounce it as immoral by western (biblical) standards of morality.'

To say you believe in a morality that does not move about like the value of cryptocurrency requires more substance than the mere wisdom of man muster. Does morality truly adjust from moment to moment?

If you're saying what's wrong is wrong regardless of history, culture, biology or evolutionary social development, you must appeal to that which is transcendent, eternal and immutable.

Atheist, Michael Shermer, who I debated a couple of years back, defines moral progress as **"increase in the survival and flourishing of sentient beings."** The atheistic naturalist argues that **"determining the condition by which humans best flourish ought to be the goal of a science of morality."** This is more or less a restatement of Frances Hutcheson's moral maxim:

**...that Action is *best* which accomplishes the *greatest Happiness* for the *greatest Numbers*; and that worst, which in like manner occasions Misery.**

This sounds noble but is fraught with numerous difficulties. What if the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers means stealing from and abusing those in the minority; something that has happened with great regularity in history. Such thoughtless systems of morality prevail today, and very loudly. The land is congested with preachers, but nobody has a Bible.

### **A Commonly Asked Question**

Before we seek to answer the question (If I was born this way, how can it be sinful?) and its attending difficulties, we should know that this type of question is nothing new. When the Apostle Paul was teaching about the sovereignty of God in election, he anticipated this type of question.

**You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will” (Romans 9:19)?**

Earlier in Romans the context is how our unrighteousness serves to “**show the righteousness of God**” (Romans 3:5). Some took this as a sort of justification for living a sinful life. Here’s their logic:

**...if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup> And why not do evil that good may come? – as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just (Romans 3:7, 8).**

You can see the Scriptures offer some pretty strong words against those who seek to use the Word of God as a justification for sinful living. The president should take note.

Perhaps the biggest complaint comes from Job. Though Job was not seeking to justify his own sinful behavior, his plight caused him to curse “**the day of his birth**” (Job 3:1). Rather than go through what he went through, he would have preferred never to be born at all.

**Why did I not die at birth? Why did I *not* perish when I came from the womb (Job 3:11)?**

A major theme in Job is Job's questioning of God. This happens for about 37 chapters until God finally takes His turn to speak, offering a few of His own questions.

**Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. <sup>4</sup>“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding (Job 38:3, 4).**

God proceeds for about four chapters with the basic refrain of *I Am God, and You Are Not*. This was not an avoiding of the question. It was a recognition of the limitation of the audience. This was also something Job came to grasp, revealed in his response,

**Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand... Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...<sup>5</sup> I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. <sup>6</sup> Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:3, 5, 6).**

The sorrow of Job was entirely absorbed with a true encounter with the glory and power of God. There is indeed, due to our creaturely limitations, a glorious incomprehensibility to God. This is especially highlighted when we consider His sovereignty and our human culpability.

Be it known; God is entirely sovereign over all things. The sparrow does not fall to the ground apart from His will (Matthew 10:29). At the same time, we are accountable for our sin, being “**lured and enticed**” by our own desire (James 1:13-15).

## **Conclusion**

What then is the answer? Clearly the fall of man has so affected me individually that to look at my own nature as a source and standard of moral perfection should be understood as the height of folly. Corporately the same can be said of communities of people as well.

When, by the grace of God, we come to realize that we are part of a hopeless curse, caught in an impossible web of sin, darkness and death, the last thing we want to do is to begin weaving fig leaves together. The answer is something we routinely see throughout the Scriptures.

As we saw with Job, he repented and came to know God with greater intimacy than he had probably ever imagined possible. With full restoration, He died, “old and full of days” (Job 42:17).

When Isaiah, in his audience with God, came face to face with his own sin, he did not seek to justify it or legitimize it because he had been born that way. He did not take comfort in the likely fact that he was not as bad as others. What he did was confess it.

**So I said: “Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).**

Then an angel touched Isaiah’s sinful mouth with a live coal (which foreshadowed the purging blood of Christ) and said,

**Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged (Isaiah 6:7).**

Finally, the Apostle Paul, so desperately acquainted with his own sin, did not comfort himself by seeking to redefine it and remain in it. In all his efforts to walk in righteousness (which is what truly faithful people are called to), he all the more became acquainted with his own abhorrent condition. And in a mere two verses he goes from the bottom to the top of any experience available to fallen people in the fallen world.

**O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:24, 25)!**

Ethics and morality are determined by God and revealed in His word. We are called to walk in that morality, regardless of what our fallen natures demand. And in our inevitable failure, God calls us to Himself. Instead of seeking to legitimize our sin,

**Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).**