

Parish of Central Saanich – St. Stephen's & St. Mary's
NOVEMBER 2017 – BIBLE STUDY SERIES
"Genesis 1-3: The Story of Beginnings"

Beginnings # 2: "The Garden"- Nov. 14/15, 2017
Genesis 2:4-25

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you have made us in your image and given us the role of caretakers of your creation, help us now, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to see our responsibility and relationship to you, the world around us and one another, as we seek to fulfil your purpose for the world, that all things in heaven and earth might be brought together under one head, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

The movie, "Creation," released a few years ago (2009) tries to tell the story of Charles Darwin and his theories from the perspective of his inner struggles and family relationships. I hope, that after last week's study, you realise we do not have to view Darwin and his theories as an "enemy" to faith or the Bible. I pointed out last week that we must be careful not to impose upon these chapters a truncated view of looking at reality – which much of the modern debate over evolution has done – from both sides! I explained that the scientific method tries to explain the "how" of life but can not deal with the meaning of existence. I also said that ancient cultures concentrated on the "why" of life without reference to fact. I then explained that Genesis 1 marvellously brings together both the "how" and the "why" approaches to reality in a comprehensive whole which transcends all the debate. We saw that Genesis 1 revealed great truths about God, the world and ourselves which impact the heart of our lives today.

One thing we didn't have time to look at last week though is a major theme which arises in chapter 1 and which also continues into chapter 2 even though the material is quite different. This theme is seeing Creation as God's temple and we will look at this before moving into more of the specifics of chapter 2.

Creation as God's Temple

Once again, I want to give credit to Rikk Watts for most of the material in this section, taken from his article "Making Sense of Genesis 1."¹ Last week we looked at the original context for the shaping of Genesis 1-3. What I didn't mention was that, in a number of the stories from the Ancient Near-East, the various gods, having defeated the chaos monster, then construct their

¹ Rikk E. Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1", taken from "Science in Christian Perspective" website:
<http://www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible-Science/6-02Watts.html>

palace-temples.² In Egypt, this might explain their practice of building Temples at various sites associated with the Holy Places of creation. Seeing the creation as a temple-palace reflects the realities of life in the ancient world. The biggest threat to a settled life for people was chaos - usually through war, lawlessness, or flood. It was the great king who brought order and security by defeating the enemy, upholding the law (his word), and building dykes, etc., to restrain the devastating floods. Having established his realm he would then build his palace. If this is what earthly kings do, then surely this is what the gods would also do at creation.

Is there any evidence of this notion in the Bible? Absolutely! The Bible is full of architectural imagery when it comes to describing Creation. In Psalm 104:2-3 we are told that Yahweh "wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters." In Job 38:4-10, we read:

‘Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation...

Who marked off its dimensions?

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

On what were its footings set,

or who laid its cornerstone –

‘Who shut up the sea behind doors...

when I fixed limits for it

and set its doors and bars in place.

Again and again, the Bible speaks of "the foundations of the earth" (Ps 18:15; 82:5; 102:25; 104:5; Prov 8:29; Isa 51:13,16; 2 Sam 22:8,16; Zech 12:1; cf. 2 Sam 22:8), "the pillars of the earth and of the heavens" (1 Sam 2:8; Job 9:6; Ps 75:3; Job 26:11), "the heavens' windows" (Gen 7:11; 8:2; Isa 24:18; Mal 3:10; 2 Kgs 7:2; Ps 104:2), "the stretching out of the heavens like a canopy/tent" (Isa 40:12,22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 48:13; 51:13; Jer 10:12; 31:37; 32:17; 51:15; Amos 9:6; Zech 12:1; Job 9:8; Ps 102:25), and "storehouses" (Deut 28:12; Jer 10:13; 50:25; 51:16; cf. Ps 33:7; 135:7; Job 38:22).

But the Bible is also clear that God does not live in a literal building, as Isaiah 66:1 makes clear, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?" This language echoes that of a palace and the palace of God would be a temple - where God rests. We see immediately that Genesis 1 describes creation as Yahweh's palace-temple, where he rests on the seventh day. Yahweh, as the Great King, orders chaos and forms his palace-temple out of the deep to which he gives shape and then fills it. And having ordered his realm, he now rules over all as he rests on the seventh day. This is exactly the picture we see in Psalm 93 (1-4):

The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty;

the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength;

indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.

Your throne was established long ago;

you are from all eternity.

The seas have lifted up, Lord,

the seas have lifted up their voice;

the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.

² Watts, *ibid.*: "In Hebrew 'palace' and 'temple' are represented by the same word, which in certain circumstances is synonymous with 'house' - e.g., house of Yahweh - the idea going back to the Sumerians, where the word for temple is 'big house'."

Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,
 mightier than the breakers of the sea –
 the Lord on high is mighty.

Further support for this palace-temple concept is seen in the final act of creation: the forming of humanity, male and female, in the image of God (Elohim). The image of God language makes a great deal of sense within the palace-temple context. What is the last thing placed inside the deity's house, if not his image? So here in Genesis 1 on the last creative day, Yahweh fashions his own image and places it in his palace-temple. Just as ancient kings frequently placed images of themselves throughout their realms as signs of their power and authority³ so humanity serves the same function. Thus, both Israel (Exodus 4:22) and her king (Psalm 2:8) are called to be God's son in the sense of being faithful bearers of his image, that is, to reflect his character and act as his vice-regents as they live in his palace-temple. We will look more at what being in God's image implies in a moment.

We see this concept of Creation as God's palace-temple echoed in chapter 2. My Old Testament professor friend, Gordon Wenham, has pointed out that much of the imagery in the Garden of Eden in Genesis echoes the design of the tabernacle in the wilderness and Temple in Jerusalem.⁴ For example, when the cherubim, traditional guardians of holy places (as seen by their images adorning the ark and woven into the curtains), are stationed to prevent access to the Tree of Life in Genesis 3:24, it is on the east side, the same location of the entrance to both the tabernacle and Temple sanctuaries. Gold and precious stones were also part of the decoration of these sanctuaries and are also there in Eden (Genesis 2:12). Ezekiel has water flowing out of the Temple (Ezekiel 47:1-12) as does Eden (2:10-14). The menorah (seven-branched candlestick) in the Temple is described in tree-like terms (Exodus 25:31-40; 37:17-24) and corresponds to the Tree of Life in the Garden. And there are other features as well,⁵ all of which point to Eden, the heart of Creation, as the archetypal sanctuary, where God and humanity live in harmony with Adam serving as the archetypal priest. later temple references in the Bible. Later in the Bible (2 Chronicles 6), Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem (built in seven years, by the way) is seen as a microcosm, a mini universe, serving to remind Israel that the whole world is Yahweh's. Solomon's dedication prayer, "Now arise, O Lord God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might" (2 Chronicles 6:41) has echoes of God's resting in his Creation as his Temple in Genesis 2:2.

Moving on to Revelation 21, when the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven to earth one striking feature is that there is no temple (Revelation 21:22). Like the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle (Exodus 26) and Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:20; 2 Chronicles 3:8) the city itself is a cube because it has become, not just the Temple, but the very Holy of Holies. And then, the surprising size of the city: 12,000 stadia (approximately 1,500 miles) along each axis in length and width corresponding to that of the then-known Greek world, while the height emphasizes the co-mingling of heaven and earth. In other words, the climax of the new creation is not the abandonment of the earth, but instead the coming of Yahweh himself to the earth to dwell among

³ Rick watts, *ibid.* - see Peter Bysshe Shelly "Ozymandias"

⁴ Gordon Wenham, *Rethinking Genesis 1-11*. (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015), pg. 28.

⁵ See *ibid.*: the verb used of God walking in the cool of day describes God's presence in the tabernacle in Leviticus 26:12 and Samuel 7:6; likewise, the verbs used for Adam "working and keeping" the Garden are used to describe the work of the Levites in the tabernacle in Numbers 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6.

us. Here, then, is the climax of Genesis 1's six-fold affirmation of the goodness of creation with its progression in both sets of days from heaven to earth. The final goal is not the destruction of creation, but rather the unification of heaven and earth such that the renewed earth itself now becomes Yahweh's very throne room. Thus the whole of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation sees Creation as God's Palace-Temple.

Returning to Genesis, chapter 2, we see unfolded before us the story of Creation told from a different perspective from Genesis 1. The unifying motif between the two accounts is humanity as the image, the icon of God, but the focus in Genesis 2 is more on the humans who are commissioned and equipped to take care of God's Temple, the Earth. Now, once again, we have challenges from the nature of the material. So we will begin our study of Genesis 2 by looking at how truth is told, then move on to truths about humanity revealed in this chapter and end with some implications of those truths for our lives today.

How Truth is Told

In Genesis 2 and 3, which obviously go together, we are faced with a new challenge. Just as with Genesis 1, we ask the question, "How is the truth being presented here?" Whereas in chapter 1 we were dealing with a poetic structure of a more "documentary" nature, in chapters 2 and 3 we are dealing with pure story. There are gardens, and trees, and talking serpents. What do we have here? Is this just a myth with no factual basis in history but an allegory which relates what happens within each one of us? Is it an account handed down from Adam and Eve by word of mouth through the generations? Is it a divinely-inspired picture the author received word for word?

There is a way that truth comes to us which I have discovered through my counselling experience. It is the way of dreams. This is a Biblical concept – for example, Joseph, son of Jacob, dreamed dreams (e.g. Genesis 37:2-11) and he and Daniel gave divinely-inspired interpretations of dreams (Genesis 40, 41; Daniel 4, 7, etc.). Joseph of Nazareth, earthly father of Jesus, was given four dreams by God. The first gave clarity as to the legitimacy of the child in Mary's womb - Jesus (Matthew 1:20-21), and the other three gave him warnings and instructions - to flee from the threat from Herod (Matthew 2:13), to return to Israel (Matthew 2:19-20), and to avoid settling in Judea (Matthew 2:21). The Old Testament Joseph's dreams were major factors in the Israelites settling in Egypt and the New Testament Joseph's acceptance and protection of Jesus as his child was a direct result of his dreams - thus dreams have been crucial to the unfolding story of the salvation of the world. Acts 2:17 tells us that the coming of the Holy Spirit is going to lead people to see visions and dream dreams. God can speak through dreams.

I have the experience of knowing someone who had an awful dream - a nightmare really. He saw himself in a huge cavern, as an adult, and the cavern had soft, orangey, translucent and palpitating walls in a dome-like shape over him. Then, he was horrified as knives came thrusting through the walls which he tried desperately to escape. The rest of the dream was related and it became obvious that this person had dreamt the entire period from his birth back to conception. The counsellor to whom he related this dream knew the person's mother who had confided to her that she had tried, unsuccessfully, to abort him during the whole 9 months of her pregnancy. The person had not known this before but knew in an instant that this was the truth. God had recalled

this person's experience through a dream so he could begin the deep healing process through prayer and counselling. Now, the details of the dream were not exact - there were knives, not drugs, as had been used, and the person was full-grown - but the truth was there.

Is the story in Genesis 2 and 3 of a similar nature? Did God give this dream to the author, to reveal events rooted in history? This way of communicating the truth would account easily for the serpent representing the devil - this happens in many dreams today - and also for the two trees and what they represent. Reality filtered through a dream - not necessarily a forbidden fruit taken literally, but an attitude and action with exactly the same import and meaning - historical facts described symbolically. Whatever the nature of the text, we have described before us the beginnings of humanity made in the image of God but fallen from grace - in history and which we also ratify in our personal experience. It is a story we must all heed deeply. Let us now turn to the truth it tells about humanity – us.

The Truth about Humanity

The truth about humanity we learned in Genesis 1 is that we are both a part of creation and yet also made in the image of God. These realities are expanded in Genesis 2. Our creatureliness is even more emphasized when it says, "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (verse 7). I said last time that the Bible does not elevate us as much as Darwin did when he said we were descended from the apes because it says we are made of dust! Indeed, "Adam" or "man" is related to the Hebrew word for "ground." Like the plants in Genesis 1:11-12 ("Let the land produce vegetation") and the animals in Genesis 1:24 ("Let the land produce living creatures") we come from the earth. With the animals, we share the breath of life with them; compare "The beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it..." (Genesis 1:30) with "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). The term used here is "Nephesh haya" - meaning, "living being." The first four times nephesh is used in the Bible, it is used exclusively to describe animals: Genesis 1:20 (sea life), Genesis 1:21 (great sea life), Genesis 1:24 (land creatures), Genesis 1:30 (birds and land creatures)."⁶ Then, in Genesis 2:7 humans are also described as "nephesh haya"⁷ - "living beings." We are not souls

⁶ "Nephesh" - Wikipedia article, found on <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nephesh>

⁷ For discussion on the misuse and misunderstanding of the word "soul" often used here for the word "being" (*nephesh* in Hebrew, *psyche* in Greek) and thought to be a separate entity of humanity that continues after death (as in Greek thought), see the discussion by N.T. Wright, "Mind, Spirit, Soul and Body", Main Paper, given Friday March 18, 2011, at the Society of Christian Philosophers: Regional Meeting, Fordham University and found on <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/mind-spirit-soul-and-body/>:

"In Paul's discussion (in 1 Corinthians 15), the *psyche* is simply the life-force of ordinary mortals in the present world, emphatically *not* a substance which, as a second and non-material element of the person, will then carry that person's existence forward through the intermediate state and on to resurrection itself. On the contrary: the *psychikos* body is mortal and corruptible. The new, immortal self will be the resurrection body animated by God's *pneuma*, the true Temple of the living God (or rather, one particular outpost, or as it were franchise, of that Temple). To speak, as many Christians have done, of the body dying, and the soul going marching on, is not only a travesty of what Paul says. It has encouraged many to suppose that the victory over death is the escape of the soul from the dead body. That is a dangerous lie. It is resurrection that is the defeat of death. To think of the body dying and of something, the soul or whatever, continuing onwards isn't a victory over death. It is simply a description, however inadequate, of death itself."

inhabiting bodies - we are integrated beings in ourselves. Plus we are integrated within creation, as a part of it and intimately related to it.

But there is an even greater truth that we learn about ourselves and that is that we are made in the image of God, as we saw in chapter 1: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over...all the earth’...in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27). We need to remember that in ancient Israel - as today, of course, - images of God were forbidden. But here, we are told there is one part of creation that discloses something to us of the reality of God - it is us! We reflect the reality of God! What a privilege! What a great sense of worth that gives us! This is one of the greatest revelations of the Scriptures; without this we would not have the support for the Christian doctrine of redemption - we are worth saving; nor for the Christian motivation for compassion - every person has an innate dignity and virtue. This truth has transformed the societies that have known it. Rick Watts comments, “In the ancient world, to deface the image of the king or deity was tantamount to high treason...If we take the Genesis 1 account seriously, namely, that every human being is made in God's image, then we need to know that any act of abuse against another human being is an act of high treason against the God whose image we bear and to whose kingship and sovereignty we therefore inherently bear witness. With this in mind, it is not hard to comprehend why Jews and Christians have historically put such a high value on human life, whether women, slaves, gladiators, newly born, or even unborn children.”

But what does it mean to be made “in the image of God”? The material in both chapters 1 and 2 implies that this image is reflected in at least two ways. One is that we are given responsibility - dominion - authority to rule the earth as God’s deputies. The second way we are in the image of God is that we are created as relational beings.

1. *Dominion*: Many people have seen the dominion mandate as the root of human exploitation of the earth, but this view comes from a misunderstanding of the text. We, as God’s image, are to be responsible for creation and secure its well-being. Having chapters one and two together helps in this interpretation. The “fill the earth and subdue it” (verse 28) of chapter 1 implies organization, planning, technology. To this is added the picture in chapter 2 where humanity is put in a “Garden...to work it and take care of it” (verse 15). As Loren Wilkinson has pointed out,⁸ “to work” or “to till” in Genesis 2:15 is the Hebrew word (*abad*) meaning *to serve, to be a servant of*, and “to keep” is the same word used later in the Aaronic blessing, “May the Lord bless you and keep you” (Numbers 6:24-26). We are to have *dominion* not *domination*. Humans are “gardeners.” (We note, in passing, John's double

"Paul, the author of Revelation, and other early Christian writers point to the final goal of an immortal physicality, an emphatically bodily body (if I can put it like that) beyond the reach of sin, pain, corruption or death. The body of the Christian is already a Temple of the Holy Spirit, and as God had promised in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and elsewhere that the Temple would be rebuilt after its destruction, so Paul envisages the rebuilding of the body-Temple after its bodily death (Romans 8.5-11; the language of ‘indwelling’ is Temple-language). This body, as we have seen, will no longer be merely *psychikos*, soulish; it will be *pneumatikos*, spirit-ish, animated by and indwelt by God’s spirit. The fact of fluidity in Paul between the human spirit and the divine spirit ought to alert us, I think, not to a confusing linguistic accident but to the possibility that Paul may envisage the human spirit in terms of the human as open to God – but, within his essentially biblical mindset, as the *whole* human open to God, not the human with one ‘part’ only available to divine influence or transformation."

⁸ Loren Wilkinson, “Making Peace with Creation” DVD and study guide, Regent College, Vancouver BC, 2016.

layer of meaning in John 20 when Jesus is mistaken by Mary Magdalene for the gardener - Jesus as "the gardener" fulfills our vocation as the "true human"). A further dimension of dominion is seen in chapter 1, where human responsibility is given primarily in terms of caring for animals (verses 26, 28) and this is expanded in chapter 2 where Adam "names" each creature (verse 19). Here we have another picture, that of shepherd, one which God was pleased to apply to himself (e.g. Psalm 23). We are called to exercise dominion by caring for the earth and the creatures that inhabit it.

2. **Relationship:** Balancing the concept of dominion is the one of relationship. In chapter 1, humans are the only creatures God speaks to in an extended, intimate way: "Be fruitful and increase in number...I give you every seed-bearing plant." (1:28, 29). There is a character of relationship and sociability with the Creator that the rest of Creation does not have. This relational character of the image is confirmed in two very important ways. First, God is revealed as community. He is referred to in the plural, which even shows in the English, "Let *us* make human beings..." (Genesis 1:26). Even his name is plural - "Elohim." Whatever the original reason, it remains as a pointer to the fact that God himself is community - a fellowship of love. That God is love is implied all the way through these chapters in his gracious provision and "letting be" - allowing a creation and creatures to exist apart from himself. Our image reflects the same ability to love.

But our relational nature is most clearly confirmed when it says "In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (verse 27). Here is relationship, community, at the heart of our being in God's image. We are not created to be alone, but in relationship with God and with one another. This is expanded in chapter 2, where Adam's loneliness is seen as "not good" (verse 18) so woman is created as a "helper" for him. In the little poem in verse 23, Adam rejoices in their mutuality. "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." He calls the woman, he does not name her as he did the animals (verses 19, 20) - there is a different Hebrew formula. It is more in the sense of "recognizes" her. So we are created as community, male and female; we can not develop as full persons without it. This does not mean that marriage is necessary, but living in a mixed community is important to express the relational character of our being in the image of God. In this sense community reaches its fulfilment in the church, the body of Christ, the community of the faithful. It is here, in our love for one another as community that we fully reflect God's image as relational beings.

There is much more that could be said about these themes as revealed in chapter 2, but I will just touch on three implications of how our being in the image of God works out in our lives.

The Implications

1. **Vocation:** The first implication has to do with our call to have Dominion. It is our vocation, our work. Work, including manual labour which is implied here in shepherding and gardening, is not something to be avoided, only something to do if you need money to live; it is part of our calling as human beings. This is why unemployment is so debilitating. But neither do we live to work any more than we work to live. We work as an expression of our living. This is stressed when we see that God rested on the seventh day. God was not anxious about creation but was able to rest and enjoy it. We need to realize that the world is

in God's hands, that it will not stop if we stop. The Sabbath breaks our effort to achieve and make the world in our image through grasping and exploitation. When we allow ourselves to take a sabbath rest we are trusting the God who provides.

This is shown in Chapter 2 by the gracious provisions in the garden. "And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground - trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." (Genesis 2:9). This speaks of the breadth of life available, including aesthetics and beauty - "pleasing to the eye." Then the mention in verses 10-14 of the rivers (Euphrates, Tigris) and regions (Cush, Ashur) and resources (gold, onyx) opens up a broader cultural development and variety of skills and peoples. God has given us a vocation and the resources to carry it out.

2. ***Our relationship with the environment:*** This leads into the second implication for us of being in God's image which is also in the dominion sphere: our relationship with the environment. Being in God's image does not separate us from our being of the earth as well. As I have said, we are not a "soul in a body" as has often been thought but a "living being" where bodies are important and where we share the planet with other "living beings," dependent, like us, on the health of our environment for which we are responsible. We have already seen that "dominion" does not mean "domination" and that we are to serve as responsible gardeners and shepherds. For a long time, Christians have seen the importance of "The Great Commission," to "go and make disciples of all nations," (Matthew 28:19) and reach out to all with the Good News of God's love and forgiveness for us in Jesus Christ. Then, because polarization within the church had clouded our vision, 50 years ago we needed to have reaffirmed to us "The Great Commandment," to "Love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:31), to demonstrate the love of God with deeds of compassion in social action and social justice. But, in the past 20 years, we have had voices from many segments of the church, both liberal and evangelical, remind us of what I have termed, "The Great Covenant" to "have dominion over the earth" (Genesis 1:28) and to "take care" of the garden (Genesis 2:15) God has lovingly provided for us.

How we could have overlooked this has many roots, part of which has been a misreading or ignoring of Scripture due to looking at it through the lenses of classical civilization we inherited in the West. We drifted into dualism, splitting heaven and earth, matter and spirit and looking at bodies as mere containers of what we have called "souls." Tom Wright points out that this has led to a downgrading of the body. He adds, "And that downgrading has demonstrably gone hand in hand, in various Christian movements, with either a careless disregard for the created order or a careless disregard for bodily morality. Or both."⁹ In terms of the created order, we have not seen creation as the palace-temple of God and have defiled it in so many ways. Rick Watts comments, "Far too many of us treat our homes far better than we treat this creation. We would never tolerate toxic waste or unbridled pollution in our living rooms, and yet we seem happy to do so when it comes to God's palace-temple...we might do well to remember the warning in Revelation 11:18: 'The time has come for judging the dead...and for destroying those who destroy the earth.' If this creation is

⁹ NT Wright. *ibid.*.

Yahweh's palace-temple, then we had best take good care of it."¹⁰ A positive relationship with the environment is implied by our being in God's image and exercising dominion.

3. ***Our sexuality:*** The third implication for us as being in the image of God moves us on to the relational dimension and the area of sexuality and relationships. Sexuality is a part of God's plan. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (verse 24). The community between man and woman is expressed as one flesh, sexual union. Our sexuality and sexual relationship are there at the beginning of creation; it is an integral part of our being in the image of God. In chapter 2 it is not related to procreation – it is a means of expressing and achieving our being in community. Now, it can be said that "one flesh" should be seen as more than sexual union – when the man is to "leave his mother and father" it indicates that that "one flesh" would include all aspects of relational life such as home and family, etc. But, there is a sexual dynamic between man and woman which is described in detail and celebrated.

Then, we see this gender relationship is one between equals. The section on the creation of woman (verses 18-25) begins with "The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (verse 18). But, doesn't "helper" signify woman is a servant for the man? No - the word for "helper" (*ezer*) is used for God many times in Scripture: "We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield" (Psalm 33:20); "Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer" (Psalm 70:5). So woman here is seen as a "counterpoint" – to help the man become what he is meant to be and do what he is meant to do. "Man alone was incomplete and needed someone to complement him in fulfilling the task of filling, multiplying, and taking dominion over the earth."¹¹ Some have even seen the making of woman as the pinnacle of Creation! Woman is a co-regent in the task of dominion. Some have seen the picture of the rib as symbolizing the equality of woman and man. Matthew Henry, the Biblical commentator from the late 17th and early 18th century wrote of these verses: the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."¹² Woman is not some "lesser" being. "The woman is the perfect counterpart of man, possessing neither inferiority nor superiority, but being like and equal in personhood, and unique and different in function."¹³

Next we see that sexual difference is at heart of healthy sexuality. Adam's cry, "At last: Bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh!" (verse 23) reveals that as Adam sees "the other" for the first time, he is conscious of his own body. He recognizes himself as human through the other gender. Only now has man become aware of his true being – he didn't know what he was missing! But it is essential to see that God did not do this by creating Adam's clone. It is not another being of like gender that God creates as a partner, but one which complements the other – both anatomically and emotionally. Robert Gagnon, Associate Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, says that in this passage, "'Adam,' the human creation from the ground ('adama') is literally dismembered.

¹⁰ Rikk Watts, *ibid.*.

¹¹ Precept Austin, found on <http://www.preceptaustin.org/>

¹² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

¹³ Precept Austin, found on <http://www.preceptaustin.org/>

His side is split open in order to provide for him the companionship of a complementary being. Marriage between a man and a woman reunites these representatives of the two genders into ‘one flesh’ and is not simply the union of two individuals. The missing part of man is found in woman and vice-versa.”¹⁴ Learning to love one who is “other” is exciting but is now also frightening (which is why we often fly away from it). But here, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (verse 25), shows that originally the man and woman were not threatened or alienated by the difference. In the Garden there is harmony between the sexes as they find their complementariness in each other and are at ease, naked and unashamed.

4. ***Our relationship with God:*** The final implication I wish to explore from this chapter concerns the relationship of God with humanity. In verse 7, we read: “The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” God forms the man - God is sovereign, in control, distant and distinct. But then he breathes life into him - which is an intensely personal, face-to-face intimacy - such as a kiss. This concept of God as being both infinite and personal is reflected in how Jesus taught us to pray - “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Humans are called to have a personal relationship with the almighty God.

But that relationship involves boundaries. God’s grace provides all that was needed in the garden: “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden’” (verse 16). But this is not cheap grace – take all you want - there is also a prohibition: “But you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die” (verse 17). Prohibition is a very positive thing because it expresses confidence in humanity, that we can make a serious choice and so opens up the possibility of loyalty and relationship (and also rejection). Choice is essential for relationship, for true love. Without freedom of choice, humanity would be a puppet, with no ability to love. Love implies freedom to choose and trust. None of us is overjoyed when someone does something for us out of compulsion or restraint - but we delight when someone freely expresses their love through voluntary acts of devotion! How many of us have been thrilled when a child makes something for us and gives it as a free gift of love – my fridge is covered with such gifts! A loving relationship involves freedom of choice. But what of the choice itself? That we will deal with next week.

Conclusion

We will close our look at humanity in the image of God by noting that it is so difficult to see what this image is supposed to be because, as we shall see in the next chapter, we have marred it so much. But there is one place we can look to see the image of God truly lived - it is in Jesus. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15). It is when we are in Christ and begin to grow in him that we see the image of God being fully restored in us.

¹⁴ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice; Texts and Hermeneutics*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), pg. 194.