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Genesis / Genesis 1:24-31

Prayer of Illumination

Almighty, gracious Father, since our whole salvation depends on our true understanding of your holy Word, grant that our hearts—freed from worldly affairs—may hear and understand your holy Word with all diligence and faith, so that we may rightly discern your gracious will, cherish it, and live by it with all earnestness, to your praise and honor, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Bucer)

Text: Genesis 1:24-31

Genesis 1:24-31 ESV

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.

Prayer

Explanation of The Text

Most stories have as part of their fabric a search for purpose or meaning. This is a question etched into the human heart. Why are we here? Where did we come from? What are we here to do? And the Book of Genesis answers those questions. Even here in just the first chapter, those questions are answered in clear and definitive ways.

From a world that was ‘without form and void’ (verse 2),

God spends days one to three creating form and structure, and days four to six filling the structure. So, on day one, God creates light and dark; on day four, He creates the Sun, Moon, and stars to fill that structure. On day two, God creates a division between waters and skies, and on day five, He fills the water with sea creatures and the skies with birds. On day three, God brings dry land out of the waters; and on day six, the focus for our sermon today, God fills the land with animals and with humanity. God forms the formlessness and fills the void. We're going to walk through the text briefly, and then examine the origin story *of* and the God-defined identity given *to* human beings: as creature, as image-bearer, and as vice-regents.

Let's first of all walk through these verses and make sure we understand what's going on.

First of all, **Genesis 1:24** tells us, “*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.*” Notice that God created the animals according to their *kinds*. There is no room here therefore for any kind of darwinian evolution. There is no common ancestor. God didn't create a primordial sludge that evolved over billions of years into all the different kinds of animals. He created animals *already according to their kinds*. To put it another way, Darwin's finches may have *adapted* over time, but they always remained *finches*. There has never been a change of kind — one type of animal to another. The theory of

evolution is not a scientific commitment; it cannot be tested, it has never been observed. It is another example of Man doing everything he can to deny the plain truth about God.

In the positive sense, though, God's creating the animals in different *kinds* implies vast variety and creativity and vastness from the outset. Our great God created the dog and the dolphin; the penguin and the pangolin; the seahorse and the ... horse; the nightingale and the narwhal. The variety and creativity is incredibly. And just to confuse everybody, imagine a mammal—warm-blooded, furry, wholesome. Now give it a duck's bill: not a beak, mind you, but a soft, rubbery, smile-shaped spatula that looks like it was designed to skim ponds and also to disappoint taxonomists. Add the eyes of a creature that look like it's perpetually just heard a strange noise behind it. Now, for the body: otter-ish. Streamlined enough to slip through water like a secret. Attach webbed feet, because *why wouldn't you*, but then make the front feet look like they're wearing tiny gloves and the back feet like they're wearing tiny flippers, as if nobody could agree on the dress code. Then give it a beaver tail—flat, paddle-shaped, suspiciously practical—like someone suddenly remembered this thing has to do actual work. Then the punchline: it lays eggs. Eggs. A mammal with a bill and a beaver tail that lays eggs. A monotreme, they call it, like a fancy label makes it any less suspicious. You discover the whole world, then eventually find Australasia... and the *platypus* shows up. Just when your brain tries to file it

under “waterfowl,” “rodent,” or “otter,” the platypus slides away, a living shrug, as if to say: *Your categories are adorable.*

God made the world *amazing* and filled it with *amazing* creatures. **Verse 25** tells us that God looked down on all these *kinds* and saw that it was good.

But God’s greatest creation was yet to come. **Genesis 1:26**, “*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.”*”

We see a hint here of God’s Triunity: let *us* make man in our image. **Verse 27** tells us that God made man and woman in *His* image, singular. So, we certainly only have One God, but we’ve already heard about the Spirit of God in verse 2; and John 1 will tell us that Christ was the Word through whom all things were made. The Trinity is here — albeit in an obscured way — in the first chapter of the Bible.

Also note that up till now, the language from God has been ‘*let there be...; let there be...; let the waters...; let the earth...*’ But now, the language becomes more *covenantal*, more relational. When it comes to Mankind, God says ‘*Let us make...*’ There is a divine conversation preceding the creation of Man, highlighting the special place Man has in God’s plans.

Genesis 1:27 tells us *“27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”* Here we see that Man is, in large part, characterised and defined by sexual differentiation. The fact of humanity’s *maleness* and *femaleness* is the second thing we learn about human beings, after the fact that they have been made in His image, which we’ll come back to in a moment. In fact, being male or female is one aspect of what it means to be in His image. This shows us that our being male or female is not incidental to our humanity, but *essential* to our humanity. Being male or female is not a social construct, but a divine decision. We cannot reconfigure our sex or sexuality according to our desires or feelings; we are made male or female, in the image of God, and, as we will see, this is very good.

In **Genesis 1:28** it says, *“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.””* Here we have the explicit statement — for the only time in the six-day account — where it says “and God said to them.” He speaks to the man and the woman in a direct, relational way. He interacts with them. He enters into covenant with them, giving them a command, a duty, a vocation, a purpose. He makes them His vicereagents, giving them authority and dominion over the rest of Creation, but still under God’s ultimate sovereignty and rule.

Genesis 1:29, “*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.”*” Note that God gave the animals *food* (verse 30), but He gives Man *seed*. In other words, humanity, although we cannot create out of nothing, like God, we can cultivate God-given seed that reproduces after its kind. We are called to manage Creation, to manage resources, and increase productivity. To take ground and turn it into a farm. To take iron and stone and erect buildings. To take copper and silicon and produce circuit boards. But notice simply for now that God always preserves what He creates. He creates animals and feeds them. He creates Mankind and feeds them. He is ever gracious that way.

Finally in **verse 31**, we are told “*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.*” It was very good. Creation complete. The pinnacle of that Creation, Mankind, being the *very good* aspect of that Creation.

With that overview, let’s now dig deeper into the three things I mentioned earlier that are revealed about Man in this text. That Man is a *creature*, that Man is an *image-bearer*, and that Man is a *viceregent*.

Man the Creature

First, Man is a creature. We were made on the same day as the land animals. We are initially given the same diet as the land animals. This should humble us. As the ‘earth brought forth’ the living creatures (verse 24), we are made of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7).

As a creature, we are, like the animals, like the birds, like the fish, also like the plants, and trees, and dirt, and water, and oxygen... completely and totally reliant on God for *everything*. He is the Creator, and without Him, nothing would have been made. John 1:3 “*3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*” Human beings might be able to turn copper and silicon into microchips, but try creating copper out of nothing.

And because God created *everything*, He has *defined* everything. There are no neutral pieces of information. Everything everywhere has been defined by God: what is good and what is evil; what is true and what is false; what is beautiful and what is ugly. He defines up and down, left and right, man and woman. There are no ‘brute facts’ that stand apart from God’s creative definition and sustaining purpose.

But here we have an important question. As a creature, which way should Mankind look? Up or down? Are we meant to look down at our fellow creatures and gain our meaning, identity, and purpose from our place in relation to them? Are we to look at the great apes and think of

ourselves as just a ‘slightly superior kind of animal’?^ No. We are to look up for our identity and definition. We can see this in a psalm that speaks about Creation. In Psalm 8:5 we are told “*5 Yet you [God] have made him [Man] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.*” So, we are not to look down at the cow, or the dog, or the ape, or platypus and think of ourselves as *more evolved* than them. We are to understand that God has made us not a *little higher* than the animals, but a *little lower* than the heavenly beings. We are crowned with glory and honour. We are God’s handiwork, His poem, His masterpiece, His highest work in Creation.

We are defined not by our relationship to the animals, but by our relationship to God. Human beings have been designed by God to look *up*. Looking down has gotten us into all sorts of trouble, after all. In a godless society, man cannot look up. Man cannot acknowledge any authority above himself. But Man still needs a reference point, somewhere from which he can draw a distinction and carve out a place of significance for himself. Man therefore looks down at the animals and thinks, ‘hey, they kill their young, so can we, for after all, we are just animals.’ They look at the animals and think, ‘hey, in seahorses, it’s the men who have the babies, let’s try that too!’ Looking down for our identity and purpose leads nowhere good.

It is our fallen sinfulness that stops us looking up. It is shame that keeps our heads down and focussed on the things of earth. Sin causes us to hang our heads in shame,

and we end up acting like the beasts on which we focus. But Man is the glory of God (1 Corinthians 11:7); to those who call on Christ, a 'crown of life' will be given (Revelation 2:10); and that crown is one of 'glory and honour' (Psalm 8:5). You were made glorious and were meant for glory. So look up. Look to Christ who has created you and formed you and has called you and has defined you according to His good will and purpose. He has knit you together in your mother's womb. He has prepared good works in advance in which you can walk. The all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving Creator of the entire Universe *designed and defined* you. It doesn't get better than that!

Man the Image-Bearer

We are to look up because it is when we see Christ that we start to understand what it means to be an *image-bearer*. We are made in His image and likeness, as male and female (Genesis 1:26-27).

So, although we are living creatures, we are not like the other living creatures in one earth-shatteringly important way. We are made in the image of God. Everything else was made according to *its* kind. Palm trees according to their kind, haddock according to their kind, pigeons according to their kind, platypuses according to their one-of-a-kind kind... and Man was made according to the *image of God*. In one sense, after *His* kind. Make no mistake, this does not mean divinity. Man is not divine. We

are still creatures. But given our creatureliness, God still forms us in *His* image.

But what does it mean to bear the image of God? To understand this, we need to ensure that we're not just thinking up what 'image' might mean to us in our heads and presuming the Bible means the same thing. No, we need to look at what *Scripture* says in order to grasp this idea of being God's image-bearers.

First, we noted earlier that we are made *male* and *female*. We are made diverse yet one. To quote one theologian, *"In an age of such incredible confusion that [one's sex] is declared [to be] a social construct or personal choice—this in the face of irrefutable biological [fact]—the Bible declares sexual identity to be created by God. If you are male, maleness is intrinsic to your God-designed being. If you are[female], it was God who made you female at the moment you came into existence. A man may deny his [God-given sex], put on a dress, or even take hormone treatments to violate himself chemically. But he will never be a woman, or vice versa... 'The proper role of the sexes ... is crucial to God's designs for human life...'"*^{^^}

What has our being male and female got to do with being in the image of God? Well, remember that there are hints and shadows of God's *triunity* here. God is One God, existing in a plurality of persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. And as such, God lives eternally in loving and self-giving community. God's creating man and woman in His image

is to create them for loving and self-giving community, the pinnacle of which is marriage as we'll see in Genesis 2. We are in God's image in that we are created as communal beings. We are designed not to be alone, but to be covenantally connected.

The New Testament also sheds light on what it means to be an image-bearer. Colossians 3:10 says, “[*you*] have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” Here, Paul says that there is something to do with *knowledge* in respect to being in the image of the Creator. The biblical idea of knowledge is not just storing information. It involves communion and fellowship. Remember the distinction between the animal kingdom and mankind. God blesses the fish and birds and beasts, but in Genesis 1:28, speaking of humanity, it says that ‘God said to them...’ God blessed Mankind by means of personal communication, personal relationship, through a special covenantal commitment. God has given human beings a kind of knowledge that the beasts don’t have. This kind of knowledge can be seen in Romans 1:19, “*19 For what can be known about God is plain to them [mankind], because God has shown it to them.*” We are to *know* God personally and directly. We *can* know God personally and directly. This is the promise of the gospel: reconciliation to God, a restored relationship with God our Father.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, we are told that to be in God's image is to be righteous and holy. Ephesians 4:24

“... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” To be in the image of God means to be created in righteousness and holiness. This means a lot of things, but foundationally, it means that image bearers are those who live in accordance with God’s Word.

Of course, we know the story even though we haven’t gotten there yet in the preaching: in Genesis 3, Mankind will fall, sin will enter the world, and the image of God in us will be shattered and warped. Like looking in a fractured mirror, humanity can still be seen as being the glory of God, but the image is fractured, distorted, warped... fundamentally broken. We lost the essential righteousness and holiness. We have become corrupt. Now, no one is righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10). Now, humanity is born not into righteousness, but into sin, and sin spreads to all men because all men sin (Romans 5:12).

Nonetheless, the image remains. It is broken, corrupted, but God’s inherent value and glory, given to humankind, is waiting to be restored by Christ. It is through faith in Christ that the image of God in you is restored. Trust in Him. Believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved.

Man the Viceregent

The other thing that is clearly in the text when it comes to what it means to be an image-bearer is the role given to

Man to be God's vice-regent. Look at Genesis 1:26 again, *"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.'"* God says that one aspect of image-bearing would be the *authority* God gives to Mankind to *rule*. Authority to have dominion over the rest of Creation. In Genesis 1:28 we are told the same thing again, with the additional command to be fruitful and multiply: *"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.'"*

To be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth *is* part of the task of having dominion over the earth. And notice the triple emphasis: be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth. Fruitful, but not in a small, modest way. It's not addition, it's multiplication. But when will we have multiplied enough Lord? When the entire earth is *filled*, He replies. Filled with what? Image-bearers.

Now, in Genesis 2, we are told the Man was made first, given the task, and then the woman was made as helper. This means that marriage was created not only for companionship. It's not good for man to be alone, but not merely because the man might get a bit lonely. No, it was because there was a task that needed a man and a

woman to complete: the filling of the earth with little image-bearers. Marriage of course has several purposes, but we in the modern West — even in the Church — have all-but forgotten one of the chief purposes of a marriage, which is to be fruitful and multiply. Childbearing.

Detaching sex and marriage from this task has led to self-indulgent, selfish married couples; and worse, cohabitation for convenience and people who choose pet dogs over children. No wonder Western civilisation is crumbling. We're not having enough children, and the children we are having are being educated by people who hate children and who hate God and who hate the kind of civilisation Christianity has produced.

In a recent Guardian article, the author bemoans the plummeting birth rate (1.44 in the UK, with 2.1 being the minimum necessary for population stagnation). His solution? Immigration! (He is writing for the Guardian after all). The Bible's solution is more straightforward: have kids. The church speaks about revival and reformation and God saving the nation... but the Protestant birth rate is not too much better, averaging just below replacement levels. The Catholics (unsurprisingly) are doing much better, but the Muslims are far outstripping us. We say we want reformation and revival, we say we want a Christian nation, but this will mean that Christians need to have kids and they will have to actually pass on the faith to their kids.

One commentator puts it this way:

“... it was God who made fruitfulness in reproduction the first task in man’s dominion. The New Testament commands, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled” (Heb. 13:4). Christians and churches should therefore work hard at honoring God in marriage and cultivating a godly, positive sexuality. One vital result is children who are raised in nurturing home environments. This calling is all the more important today as our post-Christian society excels in precisely the opposite, to the destruction of itself.” ^^^

We are vicereagents in that we are to rule in this world. To extend the rule of God through us, we are to reproduce. Yes, this means evangelism, of course. But it also means having kids, baptising them into the Church, feeding them Christ at the Lord’s Table, raising them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, giving them a Christian education, and training them to be arrows in a father’s quiver — weapons in the dominion mandate ready to be fired off in order to extend Christ’s dominion further into the earth.

Our viceregency also involves the work of ruling over creation. Turning dirt into farms, stone and iron into buildings, copper into circuit boards, wilderness into civilisation. Work was good before the fall. It is hard, but still good, after the fall. Work is God’s idea. Christians should be the hardest, most productive, most competent,

most conscientious workers in the room. And note that it is not less spiritual to be a farmer, or a builder, or an engineer, or a salesman, or a doctor, than it is to be a pastor. God wants dominion over the actual world, which includes farms, buildings, medicine, machines, power stations, schools, restaurants, and everything else that we do. He uses hard working Christians to bring this about.

Conclusion

So much more could be said, but let me summarise things this way. Human beings are God's viceregents in that we have been given the task of ruling Creation under His authority. This means we are stewards. Entrusted with something that belongs to our Master. We are therefore to do things His way. We are to look after Creation without falling for the lies that God has created a less-than-abundant world. We are to get married — one man and one woman — and stay married. We are to work hard, in whatever it is God has given you to do, and have quiverfulls of kids, and train them to work hard too. These are some of the most spiritually significant things you can do in your life.

These are the kinds of things image-bearers do. But these are exactly the kinds of things fallen image-bearers don't want to do. In Genesis 11, the people of Babel build a walled city because they don't want to be 'dispersed.' But God had commanded Mankind to disperse — to fill the

earth. So He confused the languages and ensured a great dispersal and filling of the earth. This is God's plan. He always gets His way. So come to Christ, have the image of God restored in you. Enter into covenant with your Creator. Live for Him, obey Him, extend His dominion through faithful marriage and work, and see His Kingdom come. If purpose is what you're after, there is none greater.

Let's pray.

Footnotes

[^] Richard D. Phillips, Genesis, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, vol. 1, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023), 119.

^{^^} Richard D. Phillips, Genesis, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, vol. 1, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023), 124–125.

^{^^^} Richard D. Phillips, Genesis, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, vol. 1, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023), 136.