

# Created in His Image

## Biblical Foundations

### 1. We are intentionally created by God. We therefore have a purpose derived from God, and an obligation to God as people under His possession.

- a. God did not need to create us. As a fully relational, Trinitarian God, there was no unmet relational need within Him that caused Him to create humanity. He created us by His loving choice. He can freely grant us love precisely because He does not need us, and is fully, internally self-sufficient. His love is a choice, not a compulsion.  
(Gen. 1:1; Exod. 3:14; Ps. 90:2; Dan. 5:23; John 5:26; Acts 17:25)
- b. God created us by choice. This means there is divine purpose and intentionality in our creation. We were created with a purpose. And our very existence, our reason for being, is not derived from within, from ourselves. Rather, we derive our meaning and purpose from our relation to our Creator God.  
(Eph. 3:14-15)
- c. We were created for the great purpose of glorifying God and living in relationship with Him.  
(Isa. 43:6-7; 1 Cor. 10:31; Ps. 84:1-2, 10; Ps. 73:25-26; Col. 1:16; Heb. 2:10)
- d. Therefore, we cannot study who humans are without acknowledging our place in relationship to God. To study humanity in the absence of God is to make humans supreme; it is idolatry.  
(Acts 17:28)
- e. We are not freely autonomous beings. We always exist under the sphere of God's presence and lordship and control. We are owned by Him.  
(Luke 20:24-25; Romans 9:20-21)
- f. We owe our very life to God. We have no life or existence without Him.  
(Gen. 2:7; Job. 33:4)

### 2. We have a special, crowning place in God's creation. We are created *beings*, thus given agency, responsibility, and choice.

- a. We have a special place in God's creation, as people made in His image. Only after creating Humanity on the sixth and final day did God see this world as "very good." In the creation account, God takes special care when He creates humanity, and the creation process is slowed down as He deliberately creates humans.  
(Gen. 1:26-27, 31; Gen. 2:5-25; Ps. 8:3-9, Gen. 9:6)

- b. Part and parcel with this special place in creation is the agency God gives us. He grants us choice, even the ability to choose contrary to His expressed will. We are not automatons, but individuals with the ability to choose for ourselves.  
(Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-24)
- c. With this choice comes responsibility and consequence.  
(Gen. 2:17; 3:16-19)

**3. We are created in the image (Hebrew= *tselem*= representation) of God. Being made in God's image, and being God's image on earth, implies several things:**

- a. Reflection. God's character and attributes are mirrored in us. Just as He is loving, holy, wise, good, just, intelligent, compassionate, relational, emotional, and so on, so we were created with these attributes and characteristics. To reflect God's image means to reflect His likeness. We even reflect His ability to create, an attribute not given to angels.  
(Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1-3; James 3:9; Eph. 4:20-24)  
"We are the icons of God, creatures made with the unique capacity to mirror and reflect the character of God."<sup>1</sup>
- b. Rule. God created us in particular to have dominion over His creation. We were created to be His vice-rulers, to exercise a righteous rule over this world.  
(Gen. 1:28; 2:19-20; Psalm 8:3-9; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4-6)
- c. Relationship. We were created to have a unique relationship with God. Even the angels do not share our particularly prized place in God's eyes. He relates to us in a way that He does not relate to any other living thing in all creation. We were created to be *with* Him.  
(Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27; Acts 17:28; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3)  
"...a full understanding of man's likeness to God would require a full understanding of *who God is* in his being and in his actions and a full understanding of *who man is* and what he does. The more we know about God and man the more similarities we will recognize, and the more fully we will understand what Scripture means when it says that man is in the image of God."<sup>2</sup>

**4. As people created in His image, we are also obliged with responsibility. Namely, we have a responsibility of worship, obedience, loyalty, and loving faithfulness to God.**

- a. We are obliged to serve and worship Him. This is not a burden, but a privilege that comes with the *imago dei*.  
(Rom. 1:9, 23-25)
- b. We carry out His mandate; to be fruitful and multiply. This is essentially a charge from God to spread His reflected image and glory all over the world.

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p. 131

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, pp. 443-4

(Gen. 1:28)

- c. As creatures, disobedience is not allowed. Yet, as beings, we may choose to disobey. There will be a penalty for such disobedience.

(Gen. 3:13-19; Heb. 2:10)

**5. We are created as both body and soul, material and immaterial. Both were created inherently good, yet both are affected by the fall.**

- a. Part of being made in the image of God is corporeality. Though fallen, our bodies are not inherently evil, but are a wonderful aspect of God's good creation. When we are perfected in glory, we will have bodies.

(John 11:23-24; 1 Cor. 15:35-55, Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4:16)

- b. Part of being made in the image of God is spirituality. Though fallen, our souls are not inherently evil, but are a wonderful aspect of God's good creation. When we are perfected in glory, we will have souls.

(Eccl. 12:7; John 19:30; Acts 7:59; Rom. 8:11; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9-10)

- c. Both soul and body are affected by the fall. Our souls are tarnished, and our bodies are imperfect and broken. Neither currently works as they completely ought. Humanity is biologically and psychologically corrupted, but this all will be fixed, restored, redeemed, and perfected in the New Creation.

(2 Cor. 5:17, 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:5:23; 1 Peter 1:22; Rev. 5:9-10, 13)

**6. God created humanity as both male and female in His image, and created us to be relational not only with Him, but with each other.**

- a. Male and female together reflect the image of God. Neither is more reflective of God's image. Man reflects the image of God. Woman reflects the image of God. Collectively they represent the image of God. Both are beautiful and wonderful expressions of God's great creation.

(Gen. 1:27)

- b. Though equal in essence, male and female are fundamentally different. God intended a basic dualistic diversity in His chief creation. We will explore this further at a later date.

- c. Both male and female are corrupted by the fall.

(Gen. 3:16-19)

- d. It is not good for man to be alone. This reality is behind God's creation of both man and woman. This does not mean that we are incomplete if we are not married. This does mean that we are not fully and healthily expressing our humanity when we are solitary. We were created to be in community, just as God Himself exists in community.

(Gen. 2:18)

**7. Upon creation, we as humans were considered by God good, without flaw. This flawlessness was tarnished in the fall.**

- a. We are not by nature sinful. Sin is not essential to being human. Sin is not one of the defining features of true humanity. In the New Creation, we will be most fully human, because we will be without sin. Only then will we be human as God intended.  
(Gen. 1:31, 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:20-21)
- b. Sin is an intrusion and corrosion of true humanity. It is not human to err. To err, to sin, is an attack on our true humanity. Sin diminishes our humanity. Sin and brokenness wage war on the image of God.  
“After the fall, then, we are still in God’s image—we are still like God and we still represent God—but the image of God in us is distorted; we are less fully like God than we were before the entrance of sin.”<sup>3</sup>

**8. Our full potential as image-bearers is only restored in Jesus Christ and the Gospel.**

- a. Christ is the great image of God.  
(Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15, 2 Cor. 4:4)
- b. God’s redemptive goal for humanity is that we be conformed to the image of Christ. Sanctification/maturing is by definition becoming more like Christ.  
(Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:15,20-24, Col. 3:9-10)

This definition of humanity contrasts with the modern conception of humanity, as there is now a “commonly held belief that God does not save us for his glory and to make us part of his people, the church, to grow in holiness. Rather, we essentially save ourselves through loving and accepting ourselves and heeding the counsel of psychology. The ultimate goal of this is not that we would glorify God, but rather that we would achieve our potential, experience our greatness, or, in theological terms, live for our own glory as worshipers of ourselves, being all we can be, experiencing all we can experience, and doing all we can do.”<sup>4</sup> This modern conception of humanity is destructive and ruinous.

## **Practical Application/Implication**

- 1. Because every human life bears the image of God, every human life has sacredness and value, regardless of age, ethnicity, ability, contribution, class, context, and even faith.**
- 2. Because every human life bears the image of God, all humans can contribute positively to the world.**

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<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, p. 444

<sup>4</sup> Gerry Breshears and Mark Driscoll, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*, p. 113

- a. The Bible asserts that one cannot please God outside of faith in Christ.  
(Heb. 11:6)
- b. This does not mean, however, that non-Christians cannot do good things, as God gives good gifts to all people, which they may then in turn use for the good of others.  
(Matt. 5:45; Luke 6:35; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:14)

**3. We are not God. We are not the Creator. We are not the end purpose of everything, and this world is not about us. It's about God. We are not the point. We are not the measure or standard, or the center of the universe. God is.**

- a. The goal in life is not self-expression, and becoming who we think we ought to be. In fact, if our goal is simply to become who we think we ought to be, absent from the presence and authority of God, we will actually dehumanize ourselves and others, for to be truly human is to be in relationship with God. Selfish pursuit of all our self-generated desires is ruinous individually and societally.  
(Judg. 17:6; 21:25)
- b. Our purpose as created beings is glorifying our Maker. When doing this, we will be most satisfied, most joyous, and most human.
- c. What's more, God's purpose is God. As the most glorious Being in existence, and as the only One worthy of worship, God must be about God. If God's highest priority was humanity, and not His own glory, that would make Him an idolater, and in error. God seeing Himself as ultimate is not an expression of narcissism, but a righteous expression of reality and truth.  
(Isa. 43:7; Acts 12:23; 1 Cor. 10:31; Rom. 9:22-24; Eph. 1:11-12)
- d. The good news is that 'God being about God' means His glorious character necessarily will be expressed, and His purposes inevitably will be achieved. His character and purposes are good, loving, merciful, holy, and just. So, when God expresses Himself, and when God's glory is pursued, it results in the greatest good of His people. The best thing for us, as God's people, is for God's glory to be pursued, by both God and us.  
(Ps. 16:11; 73:25-26; 84:12, 10; Isa. 62:5; John 10:10)

**4. God can do with us what He will. That's His right and prerogative as God.**

- a. He owes us nothing. He is the potter, we are the clay, and He can justly do with us what He will.  
(Job 38:1-40:2; Isa. 64:8; Rom. 9:20-21)
- b. He does not have to give us life, joy, happiness, peace, etc. But in His grace and goodness, He does give us good things!
- c. He does not have to save us. After the fall, He could have left us in death and rebellion, and would have been perfectly just in doing so. But because He is

merciful, loving, and compassionate, and faithful to His Word, He has put into place an incredible plan of salvation.

(Rom. 3:23-24; 6:23)

- d. Every good thing that God gives to us is an act of His grace. Every good gift is exactly that, a gift.

**5. We will not be satisfied by pursuing all of our own desires and instincts, or by seeking to express everything inside of us. We were created to pursue God, and we will only be ultimately satisfied in this endeavor.**

- a. Self-expression is not the key to happiness, satisfaction, wholeness, or peace.
- b. Not everything inside of us is good and righteous. We are fallen beings. If we fully realize the potential of all that is within us, we will inevitably magnify sin.
- c. Our goal must be to reflect God, for that is why we were made, that is what brings most glory to God, and that is what brings us most satisfaction and joy.
- d. When God grants us new birth, and we believe the Gospel and follow Jesus, our hearts are realigned so that our internal desires coincide with God's will. We are given new hearts, and our desires progressively align with God's desires.  
(Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 31:31-34; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17; Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15)

**6. We don't have the right to define who we are and what humanity is outside of God's authority and will. God defines us, and any self-expression, self-definition, or self-actualization must be in submission to and accordance with God and His Word.**

- a. We are ultimately defined by our relationship with God and His image in us.
- b. There are other, legitimate means of identification, such as female, male, black, Hispanic, white, Caucasian, Indian, African American, Chinese, Chinese-American, etc. Such labels are helpful, good, and necessary.
- c. These other categories are all subsets of the greater category, "human made in God's image." This larger category does not negate the existence of other labels or identifications. But our identification as image bearers must be supreme.  
(Rev. 5:9; Rev. 7:9-10)
- d. We don't have the right to identify ourselves in ways that are contrary to God and His will. How He defines and makes us must be superior to how we seek to define ourselves.
- e. These other subsets of identification cannot be in competition with God or His Word. We don't get to identify as "Hindu" and call it beautiful and right in God's eyes. God did not create us to be outside of relationship with Him, or to submit to a philosophy, faith, or religion that draws us away from Him and calls us to worship that which is false.
- f. We make a grave, and stupid, mistake when we decide that what is most important about us is our proclivities and desires, as opposed to our relationship to

God. For example, we ought never define ourselves by our sexuality. How foolish is it to define ourselves by what we choose to do with our genitals?

- 7. We are not given an endless multitude of legitimate lifestyle options, validated simply because they manifest our desires. We have choices that are or are not in line with God's will. We have obedience or disobedience.**
- 8. We don't get to excuse our sin as just "how we were made."**
  - a. God did not make us to be sinful.
  - b. Any existence of sin, however it may be expressed, is a defect and aberration from the way things ought to be.
  - c. Therefore, sinfulness and brokenness is not something to be accepted or celebrated, but humbly acknowledged, confessed, repented of, and warred against.
  - d. This is only possible in the Gospel of Jesus.
- 9. To be fully human is to be reborn in the image of Christ. Only in Christ is the full potential of humanity ultimately reached.**
  - a. Jesus is the ultimate human. He is our model, example, and goal.
  - b. The more we are like Jesus, in all His God-imaging glory, the more human we become.  
(Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 1 John 3:2)
  - c. Our full humanity will be made manifest when we are resurrected to eternal life in the New Creation.  
(1 John 3:2-3; 1 Cor. 15:35-57)
  - d. Ultimate fulfillment as humans is found only in Christ. In Christ, our God-given purpose as image-bearers is fulfilled. Ultimate fulfillment is not found within, but without, in Jesus.
- 10. The imago dei holds a multitude of applications toward topics such as gender, race, sexuality, life, death, community, family, marriage, etc., as we will see in months to come.**

"Sinners at heart do not want to live in God's world, though they have no choice about it... they would very much like the world to be different, and often they either try to make it different or pretend that it is. In the unbelieving fantasy world, the Lord of the Bible does not exist, and man is free to live by his own standards of truth and right. In a word, the unbeliever lives as if he were autonomous, subject only to his own law. Nobody can be really autonomous because we are all

subject to God's control, authority, and presence. But we pretend that we are autonomous; we act as though we are autonomous, in the unbelieving fantasy world."<sup>5</sup>

## Resources

*Created in God's Image* by Anthony Hoekema

*The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* by Bruce Ware

*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* by Wayne Grudem

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<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, p. 22