

**Title:** In God's Image

**Passage:** Genesis 1:25-28; Colossians 1:15-20

## **Introduction**

Well, because you don't know me that well I thought I'd share with you one of my favourite movies growing up. It's called **Zoolander**. Now of course, it's a silly movie and I like to think that I've matured since then, especially having met my wife Joy. But in the movie Zoolander, Derek is try to win his 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive male model award. But the problem is there's this young handsome ridiculously good looking rival named Hansel. And there's a scene where Derek he's at the awards night, and the presenters are about to announce the winner.

And you know there's all the suspense. The winner is Hansel. And as it's announced Derek is so oblivious to everything and he walks up to the stage thinking he's won. But he is completely humiliated in front of all these A list celebrities.

What the movie explores is the idea of identity and worth. In that moment, Derek's entire sense of dignity collapses. Because his identity has been tied to being the really really ridiculously good looking. So he has this existential crisis. And in another scene he is looking into a puddle of water seeing his reflection and he says **who am I?**

And that's the age-old question isn't it? Who am I? How are we to think of ourselves? How are we to think of each other? What gives us value and dignity? Our work? our age? Our ability to be productive? Our gender dare I say it?

Today, we come to the key passage that talks about who we are, our identity. And as Andrew Bunt, who's a Christian author says identity means our controlling self-understanding. That is in your mind you have an idea of who you are. You don't need me to tell you that our world is completely confused. From the child in the classroom to the CEO in the boardroom there is a lot of confusion.

And yet what we have in God's word right at the beginning from Genesis is a clear and profound answer. We need to have clarity around this issue. That's why this series on

origins it's just so important. We need to understand Genesis 1 to 11 to navigate the world this very complex world we live in as God's people under King Jesus.

So who am I? What is our identity? Here's the answer up front; we are those made in the image of God. Now that is just a simple phrase but he drips with meaning. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Lots of ink has been spilt on this concept. It's not easy to explain. But its important. For 3 times in verses 26-28 we find this phrase in the image of God. And at its most basic is to be like God. we understand this when we read Genesis 5:3 when God talks about Adam and his son Seth. "when Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. Seth is in the likeness or image of his father, Adam. You know they say like father like son. Poor Ezra our 6 month old, he has my big ears. But to be made in the image of God there's a likeness but it is not a physical image. For God is Spirit. So what is it to be made in the image of God? in his likeness?

This morning I want us to see that it means we have dignity and value with a purpose to rule under God distinctly as men and women. That's where we're going this morning.

### **1. In God's image: Made with dignity**

First we're made in God's image which means we have extraordinary dignity and value. All of us. Come with me to verse 26 and it's up on the screen. The good thing about Genesis is you can't miss it, its in the first few pages of the Bible. **Verse 26** first half **then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness.** Then again in verse 27 **so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.** So far in Genesis we've seen that this is God's world. He made it. And he made it in a wonderful, beautiful and in an ordered way. And we read time and time again that what God made was good. And, we saw the pattern of **three** days matched by the following three days. In the first 3 days, God created form and structure out of what was formlessness and out of the void. In the next three days there is a filling of those first three days. Here we have day six and it corresponds to day three. In day three the earth sprouted vegetation plants yielding seed and fruit trees bearing fruit and now day six, it will be filled with those who will inhabit it.

First he fills the earth with animals.

Second, God creates humanity. And we are the pinnacle of God's creation. We know this because notice there lots of changes in language the way God speaks. This shows how important they are. It goes from let there be, let there be, let there be, to this, verse 26 let us make man in our image.

**Genesis 1:26** 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.”

It's as if God is deliberating for the first time. He has direct involvement. Something special is being made. There is a special dignity of those made in his image. Look at what God says about the 6<sup>th</sup> day.

**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.

It's not just good. it's very good. We have a special place, a special dignity in God's world.

But there's a balance here. That is, we're not the centre of the universe, God has made us. We are under him. he's the centre of the universe. We're in his **image**. We're reflections of him. But at the same time, nothing else in creation is made in God's image. That **elevates** us. We have dignity because we are made in God's image. And though sin has wrecked things as shadow of Genesis 3 looms, it does not completely destroy our value as image bearers. In fact, after the fall and the flood, in Genesis 9, God forbids murder because humans are made in his image. That's significant.

**Genesis 9:6** “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

See God sees every human as valuable in his sight. Precious. Dignified. And from here the are so many implications.

See our value and identity does not depend on what we do. it's ontological, it just is, not functional, what we do. please hear that. because this can trip us up.

I used to work at Telstra, and after work on Friday we would go and grab a drink and hang out, a bunch of friends who would bring other friends, and this lawyer said about me, I overheard, 'wow that guy doesn't have much to say he adds no value.' They were talking about how many properties they had bought. And I didn't have any. I was quite offended upon hearing that. Maybe in my head I thought I am lesser because didn't making lots of money, or have property and passive income. Do you see? But God says, I am made in the image of God. See it's not what you do. and so friends, it doesn't depend on your performance. in school, in sport, in front of your friends or family whether your not you have aura ask your primary school kids about what that means. Our value is not given by other people.

It comes from God. and God says you are made in his image and he says it is very good. you are precious. That's unchangeable. Even if you are old and less productive, even if you are young and cannot do anything. Even if you are disabled. every person is made in God's image. They have dignity and are valuable. How are you going remembering that all people have worth? Do you treat everyone with dignity? Is this something you need to repent of?

See if we build our identity on this foundation, then we will appreciate all of those around us. We would appreciate all human life in all of its forms. You will respect all people even in disagreement. All people of all different cultures and backgrounds. It shapes our thinking about the difficult issues in life. This is the conviction that forms our stand against abortion. And I know this can be a hard, complex and very emotional subject. And of course, we all have regrets about our past choices. But Christ offers forgiveness for every sin. But fundamentally, they are little humans made in the image of God, not a bundle of cells. They deserve dignity. As Psalm 139:13 says

**Psalms 139:13** For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.**14** I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

They have status and dignity not just when they are born.

And of course on the other end of life, this fuels our concern over voluntary assisted dying. Again, this is hard isn't it? It's so hard watching a loved one suffer as they battle

sickness. But no matter how hard it is, they are made in the image of God. God is the one who gives and God is the one who takes away. And that's why we have grave concerns with laws that make this possible. It's not based on contribution to the world, but because humans are made in the image of God. They have dignity and value. We can say so much about this. But GK Chesterton says "People are equal in the same way pennies are equal. Some are bright, others are dull, some are worn smooth, others are sharp and fresh. But all are equal in value for each penny bears the image of the sovereign, each person bear sthe image of the King of Kings."

We are made in the image of God with dignity, value. And not only that to be in God's image means we have a purpose. And is to rule over this world under Him.

## **2. In God's image: To rule the world under Him**

Come with me to verse **26** again

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."

Then again verse **28** 'God blessed them and said 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."

God's charges humanity to rule the world around us. and you see two parts to this what is called the creation mandate.

The first part is to rule or have dominion over God's creation under Him. We're given this special role over creation as his viceregents. It's a dignified and special position. Psalm 8 beautifully captures this. after pondering how small and insignificant humans are compared to God,

We read **5** Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.**6** You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,**7** all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, **8** the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

We've been given the unique privilege to rule over creation and bring order to it. We're so small and yet God has crowned us with glory and honor to rule the fish and birds and cats and dogs. What a privilege. So yes, we are to rule. But notice this word **subdue** in verse 28, it doesn't mean to abuse creation for our own ends. It means to steward, cultivate, care for it and enjoying it like how God intended. We can take from the earth verse 29 of chapter 1 every tree and plant over the face of the earth is for food. But as far as it depends on me, I should be thoughtful and conscious with consumption. We ought to be mindful of the state of the world we pass onto for our children and children's children. But of course there's a balance isn't there? And this is where the world gets it wrong. It's because we worship the Creator, not his creation. We're placed not to do our will, but God's will to serve him and it is to rule this earth under him, not let it rule over us.

But we do not just do this individually. That's why God says secondly, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. There is a need for many many image bearers to properly rule over God's creation. God has given humanity, male and female the ability and command to reproduce. To fill the earth.

God is very positive about having children. It's a very good gift from God. Our society may see children as the path of suffering – I get that a lot, yes, they are eye bags. But children are blessings absolutely. So it's good that we want to have children and more of them. Or as many as you can manage. Joy and I pray that our children will grow up and love the Lord Jesus and God's Word, and desire to make more disciples by sharing Jesus. But friends as we think about children, I do recognise the very real lament for those who struggle with infertility this side of the fall. It is a real lament. It's hard. Please let others in so they can walk with you and pray with you. That's the part of the difficulty of living in this fallen world, while we recognise the goodness of the gift of children.

Friends, to fulfil God's creation mandate, God creates **male** and **female** in his image. They are two distinct but complimentary sexes.

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

That means that men and women are equal in God's sight. They are equal in dignity and value and worth. And when I say the word male and female, of course, our minds will probably go to the gender and sex debate, which is a very hot button issue at this time.

Now I don't want to pretend I am an expert at all. I'm not. So let me encourage you if you wanted to dig deeper. It would be a good use of your time to read these two very helpful books by **Rob** Smith. First is the simpler introduction to help Christians think about transgenderism, gender identity called "How Should we think about Gender and identity." And the second is Rob's bigger work on "The Body God Gives". This gives a detailed discussion of Genesis and all the current theological arguments surrounding this complex issue. But I do want to say this, and some of it is informed by his books as I've been reflecting on Genesis 1:27.

We're been created with physical bodies. That matters. We are not image bearers who happen to have a body. No. It's being with a body that God gives us that we can function as God's representatives to rule under him in the physical world. And God has created us distinct. He created us male and female. That matters. This is to be understood as in strict binary terms. For 'to be fruitful and multiply' in verse 28 is a command that requires both male and female, but *only* male and female. We are created with bodies that are binary sexed bodies. Male and female. And we bear God's image as males. We bear God's image as females. But there's one humanity. And that is from the beginning of creation. That doesn't change over time. Friends, God speaks positively about this. And so when we see this move that divides the psychological self with the biological self, what seems like freedom and less restriction is completely damaging our society and completely against what God is saying in Genesis 1.

For Church, our gender, our sex is a gift given to us by God. It is not something we choose. It is not something we determine. But a good gift from God who made us. And where the culture says your psychology is your sexual identity, let your body be conformed to that, the Scriptures say your body is your sexual identity, let your mind be conformed to that.

Can I just say if this is difficult and confronting for you and you are wrestling with this. I know I'm a guest speaker but I would really encourage you to speak someone on staff

here or to your growth group leader or friend. They would love to pray with you and walk with you as disciples of Christ.

Because the reality is this; and this is what matters most, beyond sex and gender, as we contemplate the image of God, what God desires for us and how we actually live, we know we all fall short. When we look at the world even for a moment, we know sin has wreaked havoc. Sin has corrupted our image and ruined our rule. For in Genesis 3 we go from walking with God to banished from his presence. Instead of filling earth with life there's infertility and death that takes life. instead of subduing creation it subdues us with floods, earthquakes, fires and drought. And then there's death that subdues us all. Instead of ruling over the creation it rules over us. And plants and animals can rule over us and we serve them. Every part of our rule is spoiled by sin.

### **3. In God's Image: The Lord Jesus**

But in Christ our humanity is restored. That's my final point, our identity is only truly found in Christ. In Colossians 1:15

He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn (means the ruler or heir) of all creation. **16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

Notice the image is linked to ruling.

Jesus is the perfect image of God, the son of God who rules over all things. He is the perfect one made in God's image. Jesus ruled for the good of creation. And He didn't stay in heaven but came down for people like us. He came down and went to the cross to pay for our sins so we can be forgiven. So now we can have our image restored. For by believing in Jesus, he gives us new spiritual life now which is being renewed in his image.

And Colossians 3:10 says that those who believe in Jesus

“...have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

And so this means as disciples of Jesus we are to put on the new self as Colossians 3:12-14 like the Lord Jesus

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, **13** bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. **14** And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

So now as followers of Jesus we are to love. to put on love. to love others deeply like Christ loved us. there's the list there. Be compassionate, kind, humble, patient, bearing with one another, forgiving. There's more. But it's to love others isn't it? To be in God's image now is to be in Christ to put on the new self in love for others just like he loved us. So how are you going in loving others?

For brothers and sisters, our identity is solid, secure, and firm in Christ. He is the perfect image of God and by faith in him, he has restored our broken image. He's forgiven us of our sins. He restores us. and he will renew us when he returns. So, let's love others deeply like Jesus loved us. Let us go out to treat everyone with dignity and grace with compassionate hearts wanting all people to find true life in Christ. Let's go out to walk with those struggling with their identity with kindness, patience – pointing them to the one who gives true hope. And let's share what you have found in the one who gives you identity beyond what you can do but because of what he did on the cross.

**To conclude**, we are made in the image of God. it means we have dignity and value with a purpose to rule under God distinctly as men and women. But we're broken images. But Jesus is the true perfect image of God. He restores us, and renews us in God's image so that we might love others deeply like he loved us.

Let's pray together.