

1. Glory Begun

How often do you look in the mirror? Most of us use mirrors all the time. Getting ready in the morning and backing out of the driveway are fairly common ways to make use of a mirror. When we look in a mirror, we see our reflection. It's not actually us in the mirror, but it is a true reflection of who we are. Well, there's a sense in which you and I reflect our Creator.

Humanity was created to reflect something of the glory of God. In a crucially important statement, the first chapter of the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve were created to reflect God Himself:

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

GLORIFICATION

Moses repeats this idea later in Genesis using the word 'likeness': 'When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God' (Gen. 5:1). And two verses later, we read that Adam had a son 'in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth' (Gen. 5:3). Among other things, Moses is saying that Seth looked like his father. In a similar way, Moses is saying that Adam and Eve looked a little bit like God! More especially, Adam and Eve reflected incarnate Jesus, who is the supreme glory of God (Heb. 1:3). All creation 'declares the glory of God' (Ps. 19:1), but only humans are made in God's image.

That last sentence needs a little unpacking lest we take it in entirely the wrong way. We are not to think that Adam and Eve were divine in some way. No, they were entirely human. Nor should we think that God has a body, with arms and legs, eyes and ears. Despite the fact that the Bible uses language suggesting that God 'walked in the Garden in the cool of the day' (Gen. 3:8), we are not to think of that in the literal sense. As Jesus reminded the woman of Samaria, 'God is spirit' (John 4:24).

Genesis 1:27 teaches us that there are qualities and attributes of Adam and Eve that

reflect God's own nature and being. Precisely how does humanity (before the Fall) reflect the image of God? Church history has really struggled to answer this question!

HUMANS ARE THE APEX OF GOD'S CREATION

Part of the mystery involves the fact that divine image-bearing is something that is only said of human beings, *not animals, or birds, or fish*. Theologians have therefore suggested that what is unique to human beings is the fact that they 'have a soul.'

The King James Version of the Bible, for example, translates Genesis 2:7 this way: 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' The term soul is only used of human beings. But this entirely misses the fact that the Hebrew word translated as 'soul' is also translated as 'living' when it describes fish, cattle, creeping things and birds (Gen. 1:20, 24, 30). Adam and Eve's soulishness was something they had in common with other creatures.¹ All of them had

1 By the way, we shouldn't say that humans *have* souls (more of a Greek idea than a biblical one). Rather, we should say that humans *are* souls.

life. The ESV is therefore correct to simply say in Genesis 2:7, 'man became a living creature.'

Others have turned to concepts like rational thought or deep personal relationships, but these, too, are evident in other creatures and don't fully explain what makes humans unique. Again, some have suggested that only humans are self-aware. Quite how this conclusion is derived is unclear, but when elephants have a white spot painted at a spot between their eyes and they see their reflection in the water, they will attempt to remove it, thereby demonstrating that they too are very much self-aware.

A better answer is to point out the connection of the words, 'in our image,' with what immediately follows: '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' (Gen. 1:28). Humanity is asked to share in God's rule over the universe in a manner quite distinct from the rest of the creatures. God and humans are partners in this enterprise. This view stands in marked contrast to that peddled in our culture today where all creatures are equal.

THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

All of this has huge ramifications, not least to the sanctity of life. Interesting that murdering one made in the image of God is a capital offense:

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

Whatever your views on capital punishment in the twenty-first century, passages like this show how seriously God values the life of each human being. Murder is horrific not just because it ends someone's life, but because it destroys something that carries the image of God Himself.

We take it for granted that most people know that murder is morally wrong. But what do we base that judgement on, if not the knowledge that humans are set apart by God? Peter Singer of Princeton University, a contemporary and influential ethicist, writes:

Whatever the future holds, it is likely to prove impossible to restore in full the sanctity-of-life view. The philosophical foundations of this view have been knocked asunder. We can

no longer base our ethics on the idea that human beings are a special form of creation made in the image of God, singled out from all other animals, and alone possessing an immortal soul. Our better understanding of our own nature has bridged the gulf that was once thought to lie between ourselves and other species, so why should we believe that the mere fact that a being is a member of the species Homo Sapiens endows its life with some unique, almost infinite value?²

If we don't understand that we are made in the image of God, much of our Western ethical system crumbles. God wants us to know that there is something wonderfully unique about the human race. Humanity is God's supreme creation. It is a theme that caused the psalmist to say:

*What is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than
the heavenly beings*

2 Peter Singer, 'Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life?' *Pediatrics* 72, no.1 (July 1983): 128-129. Cited by John C. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginnings According to Genesis and Science* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 2011), 68.

*and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the
works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of
the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
(Ps. 8:4-9).*

Main Point

*Human beings are the apex of God's creation
and have greater glory than the rest of creation.*

Questions for Reflection

- How does the Bible's teaching that humans were created to reflect the glory of God give us purpose?
- What is the difference between what the Bible says about the uniqueness of humanity and what the rest of the world says about the uniqueness of humanity?

GLORIFICATION

- How does (or, at least, how should) the Bible's teaching that humans are made in God's image affect the way we treat other people?