



IN HIS IMAGE - Genesis 1:26-2:3

Deep down, mankind is basically good. Deep down, mankind is basically evil. For centuries, people have argued about which of these two opposing statements is true. The evidence is there for both sides of the arguments.

Even in the recent bushfires we see this. On the one hand you see evil at work with people lighting some of the fires and so causing loss of life and property. On the other hand you see good at work with the response of so many people in so many ways coming to help those in need.

A good case can be made for both which is not surprising because both are in some sense true. This is the paradox of man: we are the glory of the world, but the garbage as well. We are just a speck of dust in a vast universe yet we dominate our world and build spacecraft to travel to stars that dwarf us. Just who or what are we? Are we much more than it seems sometimes?

Perhaps the most important statement in the Bible about man is in Genesis 1:26-28: that we are created in the image of God. But what does that mean for us? What is so unique about man that he can be said to be in God's image? Is it his soul, or his spiritual potential, his rational thought, creativity, communication ability, responsibility for the earth or a smorgasbord of all of these? We need to go to the Bible to find out.

In His Image

Genesis 1:26 says:- "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

We are made by God. We are created by God. People say that to be 'in the image of God' is about the things we can do like God can do. We can love, speak, be creative, work and so on. Sure those things are true and we are like God in those things but what does that mean for the person who can not do all or any of those things. Apart from the fact animals can do many of those things. Image is about what or who you are not what you can do.

We often assess a person's life by their performance. What they perform and how well they perform it. This doesn't say much for the person who can't perform. To be in the image of God has to mean more than what we can perform or do.

Being created in the image of God means relationship and rule. We can have relationship with God that no other part of creation is able to have. A relationship as God's children. We can know God as his children, loving him and coming to reflect his character in our being.

'Image' also points to humanity's role to rule. We are to serve God as his vice regents over the world, caring for creation.

In the Ancient Near East setting up a king's statue or image was like announcing his rule. It declared him lord over the area in which the state was erected. So when God creates man in his image, he is saying that humanity is God's statue – the evidence that God is Lord of creation.

We are made God's representative authority over creation – we share in doing all the things that God has done in creation – bringing order out of chaos, creatively building society and culture, caring for all that God has made and the list could go on.

These two remain after the Fall but in a marred, tainted or tarnished state.

James 3:9 *“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness.”*

This means all human life is valuable and has dignity. Just as defacing a picture of someone is an expression of an attack on that person so an attack on any human is not just an attack on humanity but an attack on God himself.

Men and women are given the role and responsibility to rule over creation equally.

Equal but different

Genesis 1:27 says:- Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

The only time God refers to himself as 'we' or 'us' is when he is about to create us as male and female. This suggests that the relationship between male and female is a reflection of the relationship within the Godhead. The relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit.

God is both one but many. Singular but plural. So man is both singular but plural.

There is unity in diversity – Men and women are equal in dignity but different in many ways both in traits and functions.

4 things that indicate the difference:-

1. The man is created 1st – 2:7 - There is order
2. Man is made from the dust and woman from the side of man.
3. God's first words are addressed to the man - 2:16
4. The woman is made a helper. This is not unqualified. It does not mean the woman is a 'goffer'.

What is man's need that she comes to help him with? To multiply. He needs a woman for that. The New Testament affirms this. See 1 Timothy 2:13. Adam came first then Eve. The intended significance is drawn out. It is the basis for the way men and women are to relate in church. A better translation for silent is 'quiet'. In other words don't be argumentative.

This brings responsibility to the man spiritually. Men are to step up. This gives a Biblical definition to what it means to man up.

This is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 11:8. Man didn't come from women but women from man. There is the recognition of order in relationships.

This Biblical truth invites objection and even ridicule. WHY? People want to say there is not equality. They define equality as sameness. They are saying you can't have differences and equality at the same time. They say to have equality women must do all the same things that men do. It is as if the only significant traits and role are the male traits and role.

The truth and reality is that men have weaknesses that women compliment and women have weaknesses that men compliment. Men are different physically. Just ask a mum with boys especially if they have boys and girls.

Secular writers acknowledge this truth. One of the most popular books of recent times is the book 'Men are from Mars Women are from Venus'. It is all about the differences between men and women.

Man is made male and female to fulfil Genesis 1:28. Man is created male and female and so is able to procreate. This gift of creating human life is something men and women can only do together. Man alone or the women alone cannot produce what is necessary for new humans. There is something about the man and women that compliment each other and make new humans possible. We are not created sexless beings. Our sex ie whether we are man or woman is fundamental to who we are. Man is to 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'. Be fruitful and multiply so there are enough humans to exercise responsible rule. We have children for the service of God. The Bible assumes married couples will have children. God designed men and women to be different so they would compliment each other.

Christ in His Image

Colossians 1:15 says:- "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." Jesus is the perfect image of God. He rules the earth totally as it says in Hebrews 2:8b-9.

"In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

He was and is what we can never be without Him. We know the next part of the story. We sin. Although we are told the image of God is not lost. It is marred and broken. It is flawed. We rule poorly and unjustly. We keep the capacity for relationship but it is also marred and broken. With Jesus it is a different story.

In Colossians 3:9-10 it says:-

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

When we make Jesus our Lord and Saviour the old self is put off. There is a radical change.

The new self we have put on begins the process of restoring the tainted image. It is being renewed into the image of its Creator Jesus.

One day this transformation will be complete. It says in Philippians 3:20-21:-

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Just as a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly so in Jesus we are being transformed.

Despite what we or others think about ourselves there is an unchangeable objective reality about us that gives us dignity, value and worth above any other criteria of assessment. Whether you consider yourself a failure or others do for some kind of lack of performance you still have value in God's eyes. A human is of great worth. We must ever do anything that attacks human life or treats another worthless. Whatever mental or physical disability or social status they might have.

This means we must respect and protect all human life even its weakest and poorest forms.

Any kind of human oppression, racism and exploitation are crimes against the dignity of us as God image bearers. Someone once said that human beings are like castles – even in ruin we are magnificent.

Why are we here on earth? What is our purpose in life?

Being created in the image and likeness we are to be in relationship and to rule. We are to do this in intimate relationship with God ruling under His rule. This is only possible if we turn to Jesus as our saviour and Lord. His death makes it possible to be in relationship with God. His life gives the

example of how to live the lives we are meant to live. How we are meant to live in relationship with each other and rule.

So there is a paradox of man – we are given a high position over creation and we are a dismal failure in our relationships with God, with each other and the rest of God's creation. In Jesus we can have a fresh start so that a transformation can begin.